

THE JESSE JAMES STORIES

A WEEKLY DEALING WITH THE DETECTION OF CRIME

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 40.

Price, Five Cents.



"IT'S JESSE!" CRIED STAR, AS THE WATCHING DETECTIVES SAW ANOTHER HORSEMAN COMING TOWARD THE NEGRO AT A HEADLONG GALLOP.

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No. 40.

NEW YORK, February 8, 1902.

Price Five Cents.

JESSE JAMES' RUSE:

OR,

The Escape from "Lame Horse Settlement."

By W. B. LAWSON.

CHAPTER I.

TRICKING THE DETECTIVES.

"Whar's ther stuff, Jess?"

"Yonder in the brushheap. There's thirty thousand in specie, and it's pretty near cost me my life to get it. I don't intend to let it slip through my fingers, if I can help it!"

Jesse James, the famous outlaw, stretched himself on the ground as he spoke, and his companion, another outlaw, dropped down beside him. Twenty feet away Frank James was lying under another tree.

Both of the noted robbers were nursing bullet wounds in their shoulders.

"Yer wife told me about it, Jess," went on Dead-Shot Bill, who had just overhauled Jesse James in the Western stretch of the Sierras; "I reckon she was all-fired plucky, too, in helpin' yer cut loose from ther sleuthhounds."

The outlaw's cold eyes brightened as he caught

a glimpse of his pretty wife bending over a fire that was burning just outside of the door of a rude dug-out.

"Lacks an hour of sunset. The detectives followin' us can't get here before that," he said, slowly; "I reckon we tricked 'em back yonder at the crossroads. It'll take 'em some time to decide which trail is the right one, and I'm too sore to think of moving till I have to!"

"Confound it! so am I. But it's got to be done, Jess! Suppose the rascals should swoop down on us in our present condition! We wouldn't be one, two, three in the game! Come, get a move on, brother!"

Jesse James scowled, and then attempted to raise his right hand and place it on the weapon in his belt.

The effort was in vain, and he gave a howl of agony.

"You can shoot with your left hand as well as you can with your right! Wake Bink up, Dead-Shot!"

Jess'll come to his senses in a minute!" said Frank James, sternly.

Bink Barrows, another member of the outlaw gang, came out of the dugout just then, and Mrs. James brought all four a cup of the coffee she had been making.

Five minutes later, all five were hard at work getting ready for the Pinkerton men, whom they knew were on their track to hunt them down like wild beasts and turn their carcasses over to the government.

This thought flashed through the great outlaw's mind as he helped to dig a hole in the ground to hide the treasure that he had stolen, and made him work like a beaver in spite of his injuries.

The treasure in this case consisted of a box containing thirty thousand dollars in specie, which he had stolen from the Wells-Fargo Express Company a few days previously.

After the box was buried and all traces of their work carefully removed, Jesse James did something that astonished those who knew him best.

It was a plan to trick the clever detectives and bring his brother and himself a little nearer to medical treatment.

Going into the dugout, he brought out an old chest that had been hidden under some leaves.

It contained a lot of feathers, some beads, mocasins and Indian blankets, leggins and short leather breeches.

There were dried bloodstains over the whole lot, but that did not matter, and the others knew him too well to ask any questions.

Then the outlaw removed his own coat and trousers and stuffed them full of leaves so they would resemble a human body.

His companions did the same, and all put on the Indian garments.

The four bogus figures were grouped in various positions on the floor of the dugout, Jesse James arranging the wide-brimmed hats and stout boots so as to make the illusion more perfect.

Then the outlaws blocked up the door of the dugout with a monstrous stone, and stuck the barrel of a rifle into the crevice so that only the muzzle was visible.

This looked as though the opening was guarded from the inside, and would make the detectives pause

to consider the situation before venturing to approach the dugout.

"Jess is playin' fer time, an' I reckon he's right," said Bink Barrows, admiringly. "Ther cap'n is more 'n a match fer them Pinkerton sleuths, though I'm free to confess thar's clever ones amongst 'em!"

Mrs. James sighed anxiously, and then looked the men over critically.

Frank James had found some queer roots, and was soaking them in water.

Five minutes later they all bathed their faces in the water, and their skins were immediately tanned as black as an Indian's.

The outlaws all happened to be clean shaven at the time, so no time was wasted in shaving, and when everything was ready, the captain of the gang issued his final orders.

"Bring the stallion, Bink! My wife can't walk! She shall go ahead to the Coyote Pass and see if the coast is clear! My plan is to cut across the hills to ther Lame-Horse Settlement.

"There's a sawbones there and a makeshift hospital. All we've got to do is to play Injun for a while, and, as we can all talk the lingo, that won't be very difficult."

"It'll be a long walk for you, Jess," began his wife, in a sorrowful voice.

The outlaw's grit had returned, so he answered jovially:

"I'll be there before midnight, never fear. My only anxiety is for you! I'm afraid some one will know you!"

"Don't worry, Jess! I know a trick or two," laughed his wife. "You won't know me yourself when you see me at the Settlement!"

She leaped lightly into the saddle of a magnificent thoroughbred stallion as she spoke, and Jesse James, who had been patting the beast, handed her the bridle.

The next minute, she was off at a lively gallop, and Jesse James and his three companions were ready to follow her.

"Reckon we'd best give her a start," said Frank James, sheering off into the bushes. The others followed, and were soon hidden from sight.

It was their intention to go on in a very few minutes.

Four good horses had been left behind in a clump of trees some distance from the dugout, and the

bogus Indians had hardly disappeared when one of them gave a snort of terror.

This was followed by a general snorting and stamping, and made the outlaws listen with bated breath to hear what was the matter.

They were too far from each other to venture a word, but Jesse James moved to a position where he could see the dugout.

Some one was approaching from the opposite direction, and a second later, Will Star, one of the ablest men from the famous Chicago agency, raised his head above a cluster of flowering shrubs, and called back softly to a companion.

The outlaw did not catch his words, but he recognized the detective instantly.

His first instinct was to fire upon the sleuth, but before he could draw a weapon Star unconsciously stepped behind a tree.

There was a minute's silence, in which the detective seemed to be examining the premises. Then the outlaws heard him say, distinctly:

"Sh! go easy there, Lent! We've found the rascals! The horses are here, and there's a dugout yonder! Move softly and we may be able to surprise the curs! Hang that beast! Why in thunderation can't it stop that snorting!"

"How many are there, Star?" asked a second voice, and another fine-looking young man showed his head above the bushes.

"Jerusalem! there are only four! The stallion is gone!" was the astonished answer.

"It's inside the dugout, probably—that is, if the place is big enough to hold it. Jess eats and sleeps with his pet, I fancy; and then, again, the brute is too ugly to be near the others."

"That may be it; still I'd like to locate the animal, if possible," was the detective's reply. "Take a sneak around the rock yonder and see if you can find any trace of it, Lent. I'll feel easier in my mind when I see that creature."

"You mean you'll know better where Jess is," said Howard Lent, quickly.

"You may be right there, old man, so here goes for a reconnoiter."

The two friends separated and both made, a tour of the rocks and bushes surrounding the dugout.

When they met ten minutes later, it was behind an enormous rock where two more young men and two girls were waiting with their horses.

"He's there—in the dugout; I'm sure of it," Lent said, decidedly. "There's a gun sticking out of the door. We've got to keep out of range, or they'll blow us to blazes."

"I'm not so sure Jess is there! I'll know better after I've had a look down the chimney," said Star, a little obstinately. "The stallion has vamoosed. There's not room for him inside there. If I'm not mistaken, Jess has bolted on the beast. He's left his men behind him, but that's nothing unusual. Jess believes in every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost."

Lent and Larry Davis, another detective, were examining their weapons, and Star started off in the direction of the dugout.

Davis and Peek Watson, a cowboy, slid from their saddles and followed him, leaving the two girls to attend to all the horses.

Star was on the roof of the dugout in a jiffy, and was almost to the chimney, when Lent startled him by shouting.

"Hold on, Star! The girls are in trouble! I'm going back to see what's happening."

Star looked down and saw Lent dashing back toward the rocks, but as Davis and Peek were right behind him he concluded to finish his experiment.

"The horses have bolted, probably. Lent can attend to them!" he said, under his breath.

"Or the girls have come to blows. I've been expecting that every minute!" chuckled Davis.

Star put his eye to a hole in the jagged pile of stones that did duty as a chimney, and had just caught sight of the stuffed clothing on the floor of the dugout when a shrill cry from Lent was followed by the crack of firearms.

"Quick! they've tricked us, boys!" yelled Star, making a leap to the ground. "There's a lot of dummies inside there, but the outlaws are gone. Ten to one the rascals have attacked the girls! If they have, you can bet we've lost our horses!"

"And they've taken the treasure with them, of course," growled Davis, as he followed. "That means more trouble ahead and more disappointment!"

Both leaped over the ground toward the pile of rocks, satisfied that something of a serious nature had happened, and knowing well that Jesse James was accountable.

CHAPTER II.

A STRANGE PROCEEDING.

It was even worse than Star had surmised.

When the men got back to the scene, not only the horses, but the girls were gone, and Lent was lying on the ground with a bullet in his ankle.

"Injuns, by thunder!" was Peek's first observation, as he saw the ground marked by the imprint of moccasins.

"Outlaws, confound it! The rascals have tricked us!" howled Star, who wasn't to be deceived by a mere change in footgear.

"It was Jesse James, all right!" groaned Lent, who was suffering intensely. "I knew his voice when he gave the order! Now, what the deuce did he want of our horses, when he had those thoroughbreds of his own back yonder?"

Star helped him to a comfortable seat before he replied, and Peek Watson suddenly came to a conclusion in the matter.

"Twa'n't ther hosses thet Jess wanted! I 'low 'twas ther gals! After ther cuss, pardners! We must rescue ther babies!"

"Gee! Hurry up, Peek! See if their own horses are gone!" cried Star, sharply.

He bent over the wounded ankle as he spoke and bandaged it up firmly.

Peek darted away and came back a minute later.

He was leading four fine animals and looking more puzzled than ever.

"I told yer 'twas ther gals! Ther cusses hev stole 'em fer thar own reasons! Thank ther stars, these beasts air left so we can chase ther scoundrels! Cuss Jess! I'll ring his neck, if I catch him."

"And I'll have his life if he lays a finger on Flora!" growled Davis; "but this won't do! We must be off at once! The rascals have got too good a start already!"

"I can ride all right now," said Lent, with a brave effort. "Look well to the tracks, boys, and keep your weapons handy! If Jess has fooled us once, he can easily repeat the operation!"

Star had already examined the hoofprints and had seen the direction they had taken.

After following them for a mile, he made a wise calculation.

"They're following the stallion all right! See! there are the creature's prints! I've seen 'em twice before! Whoever is on his back must be a dandy

rider! The creature has been doing nothing but jump over rocks and bushes."

He pointed to some deep hoofprints exactly in front of him, and then proved his statement by discovering where the beast had landed.

It was a mad leap over a ditch hedged with three-foot brambles.

Four miles farther on he made another discovery.

It was that the stallion had paused and waited for the others.

Star got off of his horse and examined the ground carefully, and in less than a minute he gave a shout of astonishment.

"We're right, boys! Here are the moccasins again! Jesse James and his crew are disguised as Indians! They've gone on foot from here, while whoever was riding the stallion has taken the other animals eastward! That means that our quarry has divided forces."

"Which lot shall we foller?" asked Peek Watson, quickly. "I 'low ther gals will be likely ter stick to ther hosses."

Star thought a moment, and then answered, rather sternly:

"We are after Jesse James! If the girls are not with him or his men, they are not in much danger, and it's my opinion that the stallion is being ridden by a woman!"

"Whew! Mrs. James, of course! Wonder why we didn't think of that before," said Lent, quickly. "We knew she was with her husband when they left Nevada City, and I doubt if there's another woman in the world who could ride that stallion!"

"Then we follow the moccasins! Slowly, boys, and with your eyes wide open!" said Star, remounting. "The snakes will probably be skulking in the bushes when we pass! As usual, Jesse James has got the advantage."

"Hope we kin drive their cuss into ther Lame-Horse Settlement," said Peek. "There's men there that would be glad to see him, I reckon."

"Hold on, Peek! you're right there," cried Star, sharply. "Lame-Horse is a rendezvous for outlaws, they tell me! No doubt there's a dozen of Jesse's friends in that very section."

"And there'll be more as soon as Mrs. James gives the alarm!" said Davis. "She's probably gone ahead to round up her husband's friends! Hark! she's coming back now, by the jumpin' Jerusalem!"

The detectives turned their heads to listen, and Star put one finger to his lips.

A horse could be heard thundering over a bit of rocky road some distance behind them, but the trees were so thick that they could not see the rider.

"Gone on, by Jove! They must like ditches and gullies better than I do," growled Star. "We'll follow the Injuns for a little while longer, but we'd best move slowly. There isn't any hurry."

He glanced at the horizon as he spoke and saw that the sun had vanished.

There were banks of crimson clouds, but they would soon turn to purple, and the shadows of the trees and rocks were already growing confusing.

The Lam-Horse Settlement was still ten miles ahead, and the country was growing wilder and more impassable.

The tracks of the moccasins were covered by the darkness, but as there was no shelter except the trees Star pressed on cautiously.

Lam-Horse boasted a population of seventy-five people, but, as their occupation was principally fighting, there was some excuse for the "makeshift" hospital.

Every day or two a pocket of gold would be found in the mountains, and at each of these occurrences a free fight was precipitated.

No penal settlement of its size ever held a larger percentage of desperate characters.

The detectives knew they were taking their lives in their hands to ever visit the place, unless they could explain their appearance satisfactorily to the natives.

"It'll never do to say we are detectives and after Jesse James," said Star, softly. "We'd be nabbed on principle and tarred and feathered! There ain't ten men in Lam-Horse but what are wanted by the government."

This remark called a halt, and a consultation followed.

It was an emergency that tested all the cleverness they possessed, but Star finally hit upon a plan that sounded feasible.

After that, the journey was continued, but each took a different route.

Jesse James would not be able to shoot more than one of the party.

It was a plan that required nerve, but every man of them had it.

They were ready to sacrifice one life to capture the

outlaw, and each was manly enough to hope that he might be the victim.

Twice during his long ride, Star heard another horse near him, but he reached the biggest rum shop in the Settlement without being molested.

It was nearly midnight, and the place was swarming with drunken men.

There were white men, chinamen, negroes and Indians.

The air of the place was blue with smoke, and reeking with vile odors, and little could be heard at first but the clinking of glasses.

The detective had left his horse in a shed some distance from the rum shop, and just as he turned into the main street his arm was jostled by an Indian.

He stood and watched the fellow a minute, and saw him enter a log cabin.

It was one of the biggest cabins in the Settlement, and was known as the Hospital.

"There's one of 'em! I'll bet on it!" muttered the detective, under his breath. "He looks all right, but his walk is queer! I'd chase the rascal, if it wasn't for Watson. I promised to meet him in the rum shop yonder."

The moment he stepped inside he ran into Peck Watson, who was already in an altercation with a half-crazy negro.

"What yo' want hyar? Reckon, now, yo' am frum de sheriff's office, yo' p'izen-faced sneak! Git out o' hyar, fo' I punch de face off'n yo'!" shouted the negro.

Peek did not reply, except by a curse and a sledgehammer blow, planted under the jaw of the negro.

"Haw! haw! Reckon yer ain't no tenderfoot, whoever yer be, stranger," remarked a giant in canvas trousers and the red shirt of a miner.

"I 'low Buckskin Joe ain't no easy ox ter knock over! Yer done thet thar job neat, stranger! Put it thar! I like ter shake er hand like thet thar! Hanged ef I don't."

"Ef ther mayor is on ther stranger's side, I 'low ther rest on us air! Buckskin hez been gittin' too gosh-durned peppery lately! I 'low I'm glad he's got his come-up once," remarked another half-drunken individual.

Star and Watson had dropped into chairs by this time, and in the confusion of the moment they managed to get close together.

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"Buckskin's comin' back! Look out fer yourself, stranger!" warned a voice in Watson's ear.

Peek caught a glimpse of the negro staggering through the crowd with a razor in his hand, and promptly clapped his hand on his pistol, but Star took a quick look over his shoulder at the speaker.

In an instant he felt the blood leap in his veins.

The fellow who had warned Watson was dressed like an Indian, but the words had been spoken under the pressure of excitement, and the clever detective knew that a white man had spoken them.

Buckskin had decided not to fight when he saw Peek's pistol, and Star moved away to another table where he could keep an eye on the English-talking redskin.

"It ain't Jesse and it ain't Frank," he was thinking, when Lent came in and was promptly surrounded by a dozen of the ruffians.

"Fill 'em up, boys! Ther drinks are on me!" ordered Lent, before any one could inquire his business. "I've just come from Colorado, and I've got a pocket full of dust! I reckon if I spend what I've got to-night you'll let me dig more to-morrow!"

"Thet thar's er squar' propersishun, stranger! Fill em up, Dan Wilders!" roared the fellow who had been called "mayor."

Star watched the bogus redskin until Davis put in an appearance, but by that time every one was so drunk that the last man of the party escaped observation, and he could see no signs of open hostility.

"I've located Jess! He's in the nospital, and Frank is with him!" whispered Davis to Star. "Now, if Lent can only entertain these rascals so you and I can get out——"

The door flew open at that second, and a burly miner came in. He was not as drunk as the others, but was laboring under great excitement.

"Sh! Now's the time to keep our wits about us!" whispered Star; "there's something going to break! Look out, old fellow!"

Lent had just picked up a glass of whiskey, and was holding it above his head, and Peek was yelling for more rum, when the landlord sighted the newcomer.

In an instant, he let the bottle in his hand fall to the floor and leaned forward to stare through the smoke of the barroom.

"What is it, Panther?" he bawled across the bar; "what's happened? Speak out! Is ther marshal comin'?"

In a second, every man in the barroom was silent, while glasses and bottles remained suspended in the air, and all eyes were turned to stare at the newcomer.

"No, 'tain't ther marshal! It's worse than that!" was the answer, in a thunderous voice.

"Thar can't nothin' be worse than ther marshal," remarked the landlord, picking up his bottle.

"Yes there can, Dan Wilders!" roared the newcomer, again. "Jesse James is here in ther Lame-Horse Settlement!"

There was a howl of rage from fifty throats, and for a second the detectives thought the roof was falling.

"He ain't right here in this barroom!" roared the big voice again, as its owner moved toward the door and put his back against it.

"Whar is he, Panther?" asked the "mayor," as he grabbed for his trousers pocket with one hand and his pistol with the other.

"He's in the hospital down yonder, he and his brother, Frank, and I've got a little something to say to yer, pardners!"

The detectives glanced at each other, and Star held his breath. He knew intuitively that it was not his enemies', but his own fate that was hanging in the balance.

"I 'low we've got nothin' much fer Jess to steal, pardners!" went on the man, more calmly. "We've got rid of our stuff purty much, I reckon, so bein' as how Jess can't do us no harm, I move that we protect ther rascal! It's er cold day, pardners, when Lame-Horse goes back on its own profession! Jess is the king of bandits, and we are his subjects! S'pose we form a guard around the hospital! It's the least we can do to show our appreciation of Jesse James, and thar's another good reason why we'd orter do it!"

There was just a second of silence in which the detectives listened in vain for their hearts to beat; then the orator of the occasion finished his appeal for the robber:

"Jess told me just now that he was bein' hounded to death! There's three sleuths on his track, and I reckon it's our duty ter defend him! The rascals that's chasin' Jess air Pinkerton detectives!"

There was another howl, but this time there was no confusion.

The detectives could hear the curses and anathemas that were hurled at their heads.

There was no danger of misunderstanding exactly how they were regarded in the Lane-Horse Settlement.

Almost as one man the entire crowd rose to its feet, the three detectives and Peek Watson having sense enough to rise with them.

"I reckon we'd best swear ther men, Panther! There's some as may back down," suggested the mayor, cautiously.

"You bet! An' thar's strangers present!" added Dan Wilders, who was examining a brace of pistols.

Star caught the eyes of his two chums and barely nodded his head.

Peek was out of his range of vision, but he felt sure the cowboy would be clever enough to comply.

Then in spite of himself he had to smile over the novelty of the position.

He was about to take an oath to protect Jesse James against himself.

It was one of the oddest fates that had befallen him in his whole career as a detective.

CHAPTER III.

TROUBLE IN A BARROOM.

The fellow called Panther still had his back against the door, and as the mayor promptly put himself in the same position, all exit from the barroom was impossible.

"Reckon this hyar is right in my line, pardners," spoke up a leathery-faced man, who had been guzzling the poorest whisky in the place.

"Yer right, jedge! Give us ther oath straight, and ter the devil with the cuss thet's afeared ter take it!" roared one of the others.

"Git ther Bible, Dan Wilders!" ordered the judge, as he used a bottle for a gavel and pounded the table vigorously.

The detectives opened their eyes wide at this, but the rest of the patrons of the place seemed to think nothing about it.

Dan Wilders went to a low door at the end of the barroom and opened it an inch or two.

Putting his mouth to the crack, he bawled at the top of his lungs: "Hi thar, yer much! Fetch ther Bible, an' be quick about it!"

He opened the door a little wider a moment later,

and Star caught a glimpse of a woman with sweet eyes and a sad face.

As she handed the rumseller a worn Bible, the detective could not help shuddering.

"My God! What a life! How I'd like to rescue her from this hole!" was the thought that flashed into his mind.

Then he thought of himself, and decided that he had enough to do at present.

It would take all his nerve to save his own neck in the present emergency, and besides he had to exercise a brotherly care over each of his companions.

"Stand up, pardners!" roared the judge, as he accepted the Bible.

The men who had reseated themselves arose with alacrity, and all lined up more or less unsteadily around the bar, the judge scrambling up and standing among the bottles and glasses.

"Now, then, mayor, I reckon yer'd best look 'em over," went on the old fellow. "You know every man in Lane Horse, I reckon, an' furthermore you know every rascal in ther country. Ef thar's any one hyar on this occasion thet orter be somewhere's else I 'low yer'll know kerzackly what ter do with 'em!"

"You kin bet he'll know! Haw! Haw! I'd pity ther cuss as couldn't give an account of hisself," chuckled one of the miners, who was well satisfied of his own standing in the community.

Things were beginning to look bad for the detectives, but they kept their wits about them.

It was a case of quick thought and convincing answers, coupled with the easy manner of one who had nothing to be afraid of.

The mayor picked up a piece of chalk from the bar, and as he stared at man after man he made a big chalk mark on his shoulders.

"Thar's twenty-five, I reckon, jedge! Now then I'll hev a look at ther strangers present," he said, after a quick survey of the tipplers.

The three detectives had been overlooked in the first round, and were having hard work to keep the right expressions on their faces.

"I can't hardly locate this hyar chap," went on the mayor, and Star opened his eyes in surprise, as he saw the fellow's hand fall heavily on the shoulder of the bogus Indian.

"Reckon I kin help yer thar, mayor!" exclaimed the moccasined white man, throwing back his blan-

ket. "Lock thet thar door, Dan Wilders! Thar mustn't no one go out just yet! I'm er member of ther James gang, an' I've got secret orders from ther cap'n! Bein' as how ye've decided ter be loyal ter Jess yer may as well hear 'em!"

"Reckon we'll hear yer name fust, pardner," said the judge, discreetly. "Thar's men hyar as knows ther James gang, root an' branch, an' I 'low it's important thet you prove yer identity!"

"Thet thar's as easy as skinnin' a yaller dog," chuckled the fellow; "I'm Dead-Shot Bill! If yer don't believe it ask Hunk Mason yonder! I 'low now, ther kid 'll know his own father!"

He pointed to the youngest man in the barroom as he spoke, a youth of twenty, with the face of a lawless gambler.

"It's him! I knows his voice! Ther can't nobody fool me on er voice," said the half-drunken fellow, promptly. "I 'low I ain't seen him fer a deuce of a while, but thet thar don't make no diff! He's ther genooine article, mayor."

The chalk mark was made on the Indian blanket, and the mayor's heavy hand fell on Peek Watson's shoulder.

"Haw! Haw! Reckon now you've got yer match!" chuckled Peek, with perfect composure. "Yer've heerd of Colorado Charlie, I reckon, but I 'low yer hadn't none on yer seen him! I'd er introduced myself afore only I'm nat'rally modest! Put er chalk mark on me, pardner! Set 'em up, Dan Wilders! We'll swar a truer oath ter Jess ef thar's more whisky in us!"

He waved an empty bottle as he spoke, and the three detectives were proud of him, especially as the mayor added a hearty thump on the back to the regulation chalk mark.

"It's our turn next," muttered Star, under his breath.

Lent reached for a glass of liquor that was standing near him, and as he did so he took a sharp look in Dead-Shot Bill's direction.

The fellow was looking at him, with a queer light in his eyes, and a shadow of a smile was playing around his features.

This nerved the detective more than the liquor would have done, and, as the mayor turned and faced him, he met his gaze unflinchingly.

"Who be you?" began the giant, with a cold stare into his face.

The door at the end of the room flew open before Lent could answer, and the woman with the sweet eyes dashed into the barroom.

"Give it back to me, father! Give me the book!" she cried, hysterically; "I have listened and I know what you are swearing to! You shall not desecrate the sacred book by putting it to such a use! Shame on you, the whole lot of you! Father, give me back my Bible!"

Even the mayor had to turn and look at the girl. Her voice rang out like a bugle, and her eyes were flashing.

"Nonsense! Go back inside, you jade!" began Dan Wilders, brutally. He put out one hand to push the girl away, but she clasped her hands together and took a step nearer, with her eyes fixed upon the book that the judge was holding.

"Go back, I say!" roared her father, as he saw that she dared to disobey. He put up his arm and clenched his brawny fist, but before it could descend the fellow called Panther sprang forward.

"Hold on thar, curse you!" he roared. "Hit thet thar gal er blow an' I'll settle yer, Dan Wilders! Take thet fer yer bad manners, yer sneakin' scoundrel!"

An uppercut from one of his brawny fists accompanied the words, and the owner of the rum shop measured his length across a table.

In a second there was a general movement toward the bar.

Half of the men were for giving the Bible to the girl, while the other half were for keeping it from her.

In the excitement of the moment the door was forgotten, and with a quick motion Star opened it and darted out of the barroom.

Lent and Davis were at his heels, but Peek knew better.

He was hemmed in on all sides by chairs and tables, to say nothing of the men who were tossing him about like a feather.

Only one pair of eyes saw the movement of the detectives, but at the moment of their escape he, too, was hemmed in by the fighters. Dead-Shot Bill struggled to his feet and gave a yell of rage; then he managed to get his voice above the din and confusion.

"Quick! After 'em, pardners! Ther sleuths hev escaped! Quit thet thar fightin' and 'tend ter biz-

ness! While yer've been tusslin' fer ther book we've lost our birds! Them three chaps that's bolted was ther Pinkerton scallywags thet's been chasin' Jess all over ther country!"

Panther had secured the Bible and given it to Bess Wilders, and at Dead-Shot's news he stopped breathing for a second and looked about him.

"Ter ther hospital, men! Hurry!" yelled Dead-Shot; "never mind the oath! Come and protect our cap'n! Thar's a bag of nuggets fer every man thet stands by ter-night, pardners!"

There was a general rush for the door, every one getting out but Panther and Peek Watson, and, as Peek brought up the rear, he looked back over his shoulder. The giant in the red shirt had stooped to kiss the young girl who was clutching in both hands her precious Bible.

The next second Panther was beside him, and both had left the barroom.

As they strode down the street toward the hospital, they had a few words with each other.

"A deucedly pretty gal, pard!"

"You bet she is, stranger! I'll marry her an hour after I get that bag of nuggets!"

"You'll never get it, Panther! Jess ain't got the stuff! The fellow had to bury his last haul in the hills back yonder!"

"How do yer know thet thar, stranger?"

"Haw! Haw! How do I know anythin', pardner? Colorado Charlie ain't out in this hyar section fer his health! Thar's a cool thirty thousand in ther hills back yonder, while Jess and his gang are in ther hospital with empty pockets! A nice chance ter git even with ther rascal, ain't it? What do yer say ter a partnership in this hyar ondertakin', Panther?"

"What proof hev ye, stranger?"

Peek Watson drew a roll of fresh greenbacks from his pocket, and held them in the moonlight.

"Swear to stand by me and let Jess go to blazes an' they're yourn this minute," he said, in a low voice.

"I swar!"

Peek handed over the bills, and the giant put them in his pocket. The roll had brought him a step nearer to matrimony, and as that was his sole ambition at present, he was in no mood to be particular.

"Now, then, thar's a reward of ten thousand fer ther rascal's head," began Peek again, as they came in sight of the log cabin.

"Hold on! Ther boys are there! No need of our goin' any nearer!" said Panther, promptly.

The two left the main road, and darted down an alley.

A hundred yards from the road they came upon the three detectives, who were holding a consultation under the eaves of an empty cabin.

"My friends, pardner! All Colorado chaps and on ther same lay," said Peek, promptly. "We've got a three days' start of them Pinkerton sleuths, and our play is-ter corral Jess an' gobble ther thirty thousand! It'll be a hard job ter do ther fust, but ther last is easy."

"Yes, there's no use to try ter git at Jess now!" broke in Star, quickly. "The men will fight for him, so we may as well bolt! The question now is to get the horses!"

"I say, is this hyar on ther squar'?" asked Panther, a little uncertainly.

"Haw! Haw! I've plugged er feller full o' bullets fer askin' thet thar question afore now, pardner!" said Peek, jovially. "I 'low ye've got proof in yer pocket thet ther deal is squar', an' yer'll hev more proof when we git thet thirty thousand. Jess must er left it in ther dugout; hey, pardners!"

"Snakes! Thet thar's erbout whar 'tis! Ther cuss couldn't er fetched ther box an' kept shiftin' horses," said Star, quickly. "We'd best go back fer ther stuff and foller Jess later, when ther robber ain't got sech er host er friends ter purtect him!"

"Hope we're ahead of ther sleuthhounds," muttered Peek, with a wink at Star. "I 'low, tho', them whelps won't stop fer ther money! They're arter Jess, an' they're welcome ter him, curse him!"

Panther was satisfied now, and ten minutes later he had found horses. When they had evaded the hospital and got out of the settlement he began to enter into the spirit of the adventure.

Like many a better man, his loyalty had faltered when an opportunity to line his pockets was offered him. Star argued that it would be perfectly safe to tell him who they were, but, as there was nothing to be gained by the information, he refrained from giving it.

In the excitement attendant upon the stealing of the girls Star had nearly forgotten the express company's money. Now that Jesse James was safe from them, there was time to go back for it, and also ample opportunity to trace the young ladies.

Davis, who was engaged to marry Flora, had hard work to restrain his feelings.

Only Star's decided orders had kept him from following her. If he had not thought her safe from immediate danger he would have followed his own inclinations.

"Mrs. James didn't go to ther settlement, I reckon," remarked Star, as they galloped back over the hills toward the dugout. "If she'd er shown up thar we'd hev heerd somethin' of thet thar stallion. A critter like Star King is bound ter kick up er commotion. I 'low she's lyin' low in ther hills somewheres erbout Lame-Horse, an' will jine Jess as quick as he gits outer ther hospital."

"I reckon Dead-Shot'll see to it she gits ter her rascally husband afore thet thar," was Panther's comment.

"Then the girls will be in his power again," blurted out Davis, without thinking.

Star roared with laughter, and made the first explanation that occurred to him.

"Ther boys hyar hev got their sweethearts erlong, pard! Thar'll be er couple of weddin's as soon as we git whar thar's a minister!"

"I 'low I kin swell thet thar number ter three," spoke up Panther, promptly. "Bess Wilders an' I want ter git spliced, pardners, an' I 'low yer'll help me ter steal ther gal! I've er notion I'd like ter do it without killin' her father."

"We'll help ye, pard," spoke up Peek, with a wink at Star. "We mout want ter go back ter ther Lame Horse later! Ther play is ter corral ther specie fust; then we'll git arter ther gals red-hot, and have our weddin's! Haw! Haw! Thet thar's what yer mout call combinin' business with pleasure!"

The detectives looked at each other and smiled.

So long as Panther needed their help they were sure of his loyalty, and just at the present his muscle would come in handy.

They expected to have some trouble in finding the treasure, but each was satisfied in his mind that it had been left at the dugout. If there had been that amount of gold at Lame-Horse the natives would have known it, and not a man would have been sober enough to take an oath of any kind.

Jess was being protected just now as a matter of honor, and honor at Lame-Horse was an uncertain article.

CHAPTER IV.

MAD MAG.

It was a weary jaunt back over the hills to the dugout, and the detectives, who had been hours in the saddle, were rapidly becoming exhausted.

The sun had been up an hour when they finally sighted the clump of trees that towered up behind the clumsy dugout chimney. Lent was riding in the rear, and looked as pale as a ghost. His ankle was hurting him badly, and he was faint and hungry. Suddenly a whoop from Star made him prick up his ears.

The detective had sighted smoke curling up above the bushes.

"What ther deuce does that mean?" he began when Star stopped them.

"Go easy, pards!" he said, with a wink at his friends. "Thar's somebody yonder! As like as not it mout be them sleuthhounds."

"Reckon they won't stand much show with us if they be sleuthhounds, pardners," spoke up Panther, promptly. "We kin creep up softly an' pepper ther rascals. Snakes! What if ther doggoned curs had swiped thet thar boodle."

"We'd have ter fight for it," said Davis, soberly. "Get your weapons in order, pards! We ain't come from Colorado ter be outdone by detectives! I'll take ther lead an' give yer ther signal! Thar's jest er chance, yer know, of it's bein' ther wimmin!"

"Gosh! I never thought of thet thar!" muttered Peek, as he fell in behind Davis.

Panther brought his horse up next, with Star and Lent behind him.

The detectives had no notion of letting him trick them.

There was a careful push forward of a dozen rods, then Davis raised himself in his stirrups and took a sharp look ahead.

At that minute a creature sprang out of the bushes.

It was so close to Davis that his horse shied and snorted.

The detective had his hand upon his weapon, and the hammer was raised promptly, but the weapon was not discharged, for there appeared to be no need of it.

The creature who had accosted him was apparently a hideous old hag, her form covered with an assortment of tattered rags and her face half-covered by a cotton bonnet.

Throwing up both hands, she began a series of gestures, which were accompanied by shrill cries and queer cackling laughter.

"Mad Mag, by ther etarnals!" said Panther, promptly. "Look out fer her, pards! She's er hoodoo! She'll queer ther game! I ruther hev met ther devil then thet thar old hag, pardners!"

The woman turned her back as she spoke, and started for the dugout, getting through the bushes at an incredible speed, and giving Davis a job to make his horse follow her.

"She's er gypsie! I've knowed ther old witch fer years!" went on Panther, as he and Star urged their horses ahead. "Reckon, now, she's ther slickest thief this side o' ther Sierras! Whoop! Snakes an' crocodiles! I'm on to ther old critter's game! She's smelled thet thar gold, pardners! Jumpin' sandhills! I jest thought of it! She's er huntin' thet thar thirty thousand! Cuss ther miserly old hell-cat!"

Panther had become so excited that he had forged ahead, and Star and Lent got a word with each other.

"He may be right, and he may not! I've got my suspicions," said Star, quickly.

"Don't take a chance, old man! Jimminy! My foot is killing me! I've got to stop, Star! I can't go any farther!"

Lent slid from the saddle as he spoke, and Star bent over him. In a minute the bandage was off and Star was rubbing the wounded ankle.

A yell from Davis made them both spring to their feet, but in a second they understood that the cry did not mean danger.

"Whoop! Hurrah! The girls are here! They're in the dugout and the old hag is standing guard! Come on, Star!" roared Davis, who had forgotten everything but Flora.

"The fellow has gone crazy! What the devil is he thinking about!" cried Lent, leaning heavily on Star's shoulder.

There was a crack of a revolver, and both detectives stood motionless, while Panther pulled his horse up in the bushes a hundred feet ahead of them.

Another crack of a weapon was answered by a yell from Davis. The detective was sitting erect, with his finger still upon the trigger, but quite naturally he was in no hurry to shoot at a woman.

"She's on ther rampage! Ther old hag's guardin'

ther door like er she bear!" called Panther over his shoulder. "Look at ther beldame, pards! She kin handle a rifle like er United States soldier! Now, what ther devil ails ther flambeasted old critter!"

Star leaped back into his saddle and touched his mount with his spurs.

In less than a minute he was abreast of Davis and shouting a word of warning to the dragon on guard before the dugout.

"Drop that weapon, Mrs. James! You can't fool me with your rags and bonnet! Another move and I'll forget that you are a woman!" he shouted.

The hideous old creature, who was trying to fill up the door of the dugout, stood her ground for a minute, but as Star raised his weapon, he saw her waver.

"Curse you! So you are Jesse James' wife, are you? If I'd known that before I reckon you wouldn't have got two shots at me!" roared Davis, furiously.

There was a feminine shriek at the sound of his voice, and the figure in the doorway was promptly toppled over.

Flora Peters and Ada Lyons fairly leaped out of the place, and both gave a shout of joy as they recognized the detectives.

Mrs. James tossed her bonnet to one side, and let her rifle fall from her fingers.

As she dropped in a heap near the dugout even Star began to pity her.

Davis clasped Flora in his arms, and Peek attempted to kiss Ada, but there was a coldness in the latter's manner that puzzled the cowboy.

Star picked up the rifle and saw that the outlaw's wife was unarmed before he asked an explanation of her change in costume.

When the girls finally related their adventure, the detectives stared a little.

They could hardly believe that the outlaw's wife was so clever, or that any woman in the world would undertake what she had undertaken. The story, as Flora told it, ran much as follows:

The outlaws had stolen them, horses and all, and then turned them over to Mrs. James, exactly as the detectives had suspected.

Mrs. James was to find lodgings for herself and the girls at a ranch ten miles from Lame Horse, and steal away to her husband as soon as she could safely do so. But something happened half-way to the settlement that changed the plans of the plucky woman.

She overhauled Mad Mag headed straight for the dugout, and it occurred to her to go back and guard the hidden money for fear the old woman might accidentally find it.

At the point of her pistol she forced the two girls to gallop away; then she followed Mad Mag, and here there was a blank in the story. No one knew what had happened between the two women.

After cutting circles all night, the two girls found themselves within a hundred yards of the dugout at daybreak, and discovered a woman that they took to be Mad Mag bending over a pile of fagots.

She gave them some coffee and appeared to be friendly.

At the first sound of hoofbeats she chased them into the dugout and then took the peculiar method of defending them that has just been stated.

Now she was sitting huddled in a heap, with her head upon her knees, and the two girls were inclined to look upon her pityingly.

Peek Watson was beginning to be worried now, but Star made it easy for him by telling Panther the whole story.

The fellow was inclined to be ugly when he found that the express company's money was not to be divided even if it was found, but, as they were four to one, he decided to say nothing.

"We had to lie a little. Reckon we wouldn't have got out of Lame-Horse alive if we hadn't," chuckled Star.

"Thet thar's right, pard, and I don't blame ye," said the disappointed lover, after a minute. "But yer'll help me steal ther gal jest ther same, won't yer?"

The detectives recalled the scene in the barroom, and Star promptly nodded his head.

"You bet we will! The girl's a peach, and her dad's a brute! You can have her, that is, if the gal is willin'!"

"And we'll help you out on the wedding finery," laughed Davis, who was very happy, "but you've got to stick to us, old man! There's to be no balking, remember!"

A businesslike consultation followed as soon as the lovers had exchanged a sufficient number of tender words and glances, which resulted in Mrs. James being made a prisoner in the dugout. Davis dragged out the dummies and made room for her, and Star crawled up on the roof and blocked up the chimney.

Then the young people prepared to spend the day pleasantly, and the horses were allowed to rest and feed at their leisure.

The weather was balmy, and Lent stretched out on the ground, while Flora rebandaged Davis' injured ankle. Star skirmished around in search both of the hidden treasure box and of water, and was rewarded by finding the stallion half-a-mile from the dugout behind a clump of trees.

"By jove! You're a beauty all right! The idea of a woman riding that beast!" he exclaimed, as he came upon it.

A cackle in the bushes followed his remark, and the detective turned to see a pair of ferretlike eyes glaring at him from the bushes.

A second later the owner of the eyes was out in the clearing.

It was a genuine old hag this time, and Star knew it was Mad Mag. He recognized Mrs. James' stylish garments, which hung outlandishly on the scrawny figure.

"He! He! He! I kin ride ther critter! Lemme go and I'll show you!" cackled the queer old creature.

Star clapped his hand over her mouth and gave her a shake.

He did not mean that she should make a racket, for fear some of her friends might be hiding near there.

"Mrs. James didn't get much the best of you, I see! It's lucky I came just as I did! I reckon you'd have stolen the stallion in another minute!" he said, sternly.

The old creature gave a quick motion, and jerked her head loose.

"Turn about's fair play," she squealed in her shrill voice. "She stole my dress, curse her, and left me these! He! He! Another minute and I'd have showed yer I could ride him! Bless my soul! Mad Mag has rode wuss critters than him! Gimme ther chance ter ride him! He! He! He! Jest gimme ther chance, mister!"

Star knew he must not be absent from the others long, but he was at his wits' end what to do with the old creature.

He managed to get a firmer grip of her shoulder, and another shake was administered that shut her off short in the middle of a cackle.

"Are you alone? Tell me the truth and I'll give

you a dollar!" he said, coaxingly, at the same time drawing the amount from his pocket.

The woman's small eyes became bright in a second, and she shook her head vigorously.

Star took the action to mean that she would not answer, so he used his left hand to draw and cock a weapon.

"Listen!" he said, sternly. "I'll let you go your way, but if I see you again or any of your people I'll blow daylight through you! Do you understand me, madam?"

The old dame stood perfectly still, so the detective loosened his hold. In a second she wheeled around and darted into the bushes.

"If I catch you anywhere on the trail to Lame-Horse in the next twenty-four hours it will go hard with you!" Star called out, grimly; then he untied the stallion and tried to mount him.

Instantly the horse reared and plunged, and Star was unseated. He tried again and again, with no better results.

The creature was too vicious for him to be safe in his vicinity.

The crashing of the stallion in the bushes must have amused Mad Mag, for, although the detective could not see her, he could hear a faint cackle.

This nerved him to do his best, and a second later he was on the stallion's back and dashing toward the dugout like a streak of lightning.

Lent and Davis were on their feet, with their weapons cocked, when he came up, but as soon as they saw who and what it was they gave a shout of victory.

"Jess'll go crazy when he learns we've got his horse! By the gods! What a beast! Hang on to him, old man!" yelled Davis.

The three detectives and the girls got as near the horse as they could, and at that minute Star turned to look for Panther.

"He's looking for a rabbit or a bird," said Lent, quickly. "We can't camp out here all day without something in the shape of provender."

"Hark! What's that?" asked Star, jerking the stallion to its haunches; "I heard one of the horses snort! Take a look at them, Davis!"

Davis made a rush for the spot where the creatures had been tethered, and then gave a yell that made

Star forget his danger and stand up straight in his stirrups.

"Quick! They've gone together! The outlaw's wife and that knave, Panther!" howled Davis.

Star made a dash forward, and fired his pistol.

Then, as the two had disappeared among the trees with two hundred yards between them, he turned and came back to his companions.

"Let him go! He's a traitor at best! That wasn't Mrs. James; she's safe in the dugout. That was Mad Mag herself. I just found her trying to steal the stallion."

"That leaves us one horse shy," said Davis, glumly, "and, of course, that cur will go straight back to the settlement and tell what's happened!"

"Once in the James gang, you are always in it, they say. That giant used to belong to the gang, he said," remarked Lent, reflectively. "No doubt he thought we were lying about the thirty thousand."

"He thinks there's more to be gotten out of Jess than out of us! The cur has no use for honest men," said Star; "and to think that he is planning to marry a good woman!"

There was a combined shriek from the girls, so the detective explained. After that the party settled down to another consultation, but this time they remained in a spot where they could watch both the dugout and the horses.

Star shot a couple of rabbits after that, and the girls found some berries. When the repast was ready Star took a cocked revolver in one hand and some food in the other, and the others rolled away the stone at the door of the dugout.

Mrs. James was where they had left her, her face pale and her eyes dry.

She would neither eat nor sleep, but it was not her own position that prevented her.

The poor woman was worrying over her outlaw husband.

She would willingly have walked to his bedside if the detectives would let her, but the brave fellows had other plans in view that they considered wiser.

They were waiting until nightfall to put them into action.

During the day the search was continued for the box, but, thanks to Jesse James' cleverness, they could not so much as discover a trace of it.

CHAPTER V.

A SCENE AT "LAME HORSE."

Every hour that passed made the detectives more uneasy.

Only the thought that Jesse James and his brother Frank were laid up in the hospital kept them from starting ahead recklessly.

They had decided to send Mrs. James and the girls to the ranch, twenty miles distant, under the care of Peek Watson, and then the three detectives meant to try once more to enter the Lone Horse settlement, and either bribe or force the natives to turn the outlaw gang over to them.

It was a nervy undertaking for three men to do, even though they were armed with authority from the United States Government.

Authority of that kind had very little weight in Lone Horse, but Star had reason to think that there were a few men there who could be relied upon.

The important thing now was to find these men secretly and try to enlist them under the banner of law and order.

At the very last minute Lent was found too ill to make so hazardous an attempt, so he was added to the guard in charge of the ladies. He was also to send official telegrams to Chicago and the United States marshal, and send help to Star at the Lame Horse immediately.

Both Flora and Ada were armed, but the outlaw's wife was mounted upon the poorest horse, and not allowed to carry a weapon.

She accepted her position stolidly, and looked so dignified in her rags that Lent had hard work to keep the girls from kissing her.

Only the sternest of orders were noticed by them, but as it took all of their time to guide their horses over the rough ground, they soon had other ways for directing their energies.

Star rode the stallion, which had become moderately tractable now, and Davis followed upon a spirited broncho, and both kept their ears and eyes open on the lookout for Panther and his companion.

Whether Mad Mag had found the express box they did not know. It was a question which they would have given a good deal to have answered.

In spite of their good mounts, the brave fellows felt a little downspirited. They took the ride as easily as possible, planning their future movements—all

the way, and reached the outskirts of Lame Horse a little past midnight.

They could see the lights twinkling in the cabins, so knew that the settlement was on the watch for something.

"There's signs of trouble ahead, old man," said Star, after a little thinking. "I've counted thirty-nine lights, and that's about all the windows there are! Now, what the devil do you suppose has happened?"

"I'll take a sneak up to the first shack along the road and see if I can find out," said Davis, promptly. "If I get into trouble, I'll give the signal."

He moved ahead cautiously, as he spoke, and was soon near a shanty where a kerosene lamp was burning in the window.

Slipping from his horse, he crept up under the window, and, after listening a few moments, glided back to his companion.

"The devil's to pay," was his first bit of information; "Nig Hankinson, one of the tenderfoot miners, has found a pocket, they say! The fellow won't divvy with the crowd, and the natives are layin' for him."

"What was the find worth, did you hear?" asked Star, eagerly.

"In the neighborhood of five thousand! A big haul for this section! The men are all crazy!"

"It's a wonder there ain't a free fight," began Star, when a yell stopped him.

"They can't find him! The fellow has hidden himself!" said Davis, quickly; then both moved out of the road into the shadow of some rocks, for a chorus of yells showed that some one was coming.

"It's Nig! Don't stop him! It'll clean out the place!" whispered Davis, as a man dashed toward them, almost bent double, and making a sharp turn to the right, struck into the bushes without seeing them. Star drew back even farther and held the stallion by the nose while Davis flattened himself and his horse against the opposite side of the boulder.

"They're after him! Good luck to the fellow! May his legs never give out!" chuckled Star, as, with a hideous shout, the foremost of the maddened crowd dashed past them on horseback.

"After him, Bill! Chase ther whelp ter cover!" yelled the mayor's voice, and the horses thundered on thinking that their quarry was ahead of them. There was another chorus of yells and a mob of

miners half-a-hundred strong, came surging down the street and swept on like an avalanche after the offender.

"Lynch him!"

"Hang the stingy cuss!"

"We don't want no one in Lame Hoss that's richer'n his neighbor!"

"Scalp ther fool! Ter ther Jumpin' Blazes with ther close-fisted miser!"

These yells cut the air as the men stumbled on, all intent upon catching the lucky miner who had refused to divide his day's earnings with them.

After they had passed from sight and their voices were growing dimmer, Star urged his stallion into the road and headed it for the settlement.

"It's now or never, old man!" he said, in a low voice. "There ain't more'n a dozen men left! I'm going to fire the hospital if I can't get hold of Jess any other way!"

He moved ahead as he spoke, and Davis after him, but they were hardly on the main thoroughfare before they heard the mob returning.

Davis put spurs to his horse, and just as he sighted the hospital he saw a group of mounted men leaving it.

"The guard, I reckon! Come on!" he said, sharply.

They dashed down the street, which was as dark as a pocket, but the four mounted men were out of sight in less than a minute.

"That's strange! Jehosaphat! Suppose it was Jess!" yelled Davis, excitedly.

Star had just thought the same thing, and touched up the stallion. A second later some one crossed his path so suddenly that they came near a collision.

"Hold on thar, stranger!" said a voice, that Star recognized as belonging to Buckskin Joe, the negro.

The detective pulled in the stallion, and dropped the trigger of his weapon. As the negro fell to the ground he darted after the outlaws.

A yell from Davis brought him up with a short stop.

His chum's quick eye had caught a clever manœuvre.

The four men had jumped a hedge and were coming back through a sort of alley between the hills and the cabins.

He had seen their forms outlined for an instant in the light from one of the cabin windows.

Star dashed back, and, throwing his bridle to Davis, he slipped to the ground. The door of the hospital shanty was open, and he was in in a jiffy.

Before Davis could count ten he was out again and back in the saddle, giving his chum the benefit of his observations.

"The ranch is empty! Jess is after that gold, I reckon! He means to steal the stuff right under their noses and skip! Exactly the thanks I thought they'd get for protecting him!"

"Which way will he go?" asked Davis, looking back over his shoulder.

Star answered by following the route the outlaws had taken.

There was a sharp dash up the street, and a couple of jumps over hedges, and the detectives found themselves in the alley behind the cabins, with the outlaws skulking not more than a dozen rods ahead of them.

"Now, we'll wait and see what they do next," began Star.

There was so much yelling by this time that they could talk in ordinary tones, and, as that particular window light had been put out, there was no danger of the crowd seeing them. Howl after howl went up, and torches began to flare; then the detectives caught some words that were being shouted by the mayor.

"We'll give ther cuss five minutes ter tell where he's hid ther stuff!" he bawled. "If he don't tell by that time we'll lynch ther sinner!"

"Reckon burnin' would be better! Hangin's too quick!" yelled another voice.

Star and Davis moved nearer to each other, but in watching the mob over a row of dooryards they did not forget to keep their ears open for the outlaws.

"They've got him! I pity the cuss!" said Davis, under his breath. "He won't get much mercy from that mob, I reckon! They're as mad as hornets! They've even forgotten their charges!"

"Suppose they think Jess is too bad off to be out! They don't know him!" was Star's answer, as he gave a sharp glance down the alley. "Jess must have some idea where that stuff is hidden or he wouldn't take a chance with that lame shoulder," went on Star, after he had watched the scene a minute.

"Gee! Won't there be a hot time when they find out what's going on! It's mighty dangerous busi-

ness, but I'm going to be in at the death! Lie low, old man, and look out for the torches!"

He spoke just in time, for a light suddenly flashed across the alley. Davis drew back behind some bushes and the light moved on.

It was flashed from a blazing pine knot in the hands of a woman who was hurrying over to join the crowd around Nig Hankinson.

There was not a sound from the direction of the outlaws, so the detectives turned their attention to what was taking place in the road in front of the rum-shop owned by Dan Wilders.

"By thunder! I believe they are going to burn the fellow at the stake!" was Star's first observation.

A great glare of light seemed to back up this theory, and the blaze from a bonfire suddenly lit up the shanties. This served to make the darkness in the alley more intense, so the detectives began to feel a degree of safety.

"Look there, Star! To the left of the bonfire!" whispered Davis, sharply. "There's another pile, with a stake in the middle of it! Great Caesar's ghost! Is it possible they can be so barbarous?"

"I fancy they are only trying to scare him! Even Jesse James would rebel against a deed like that! We must put a stop to it if they go any farther, old man! Hang it! I can't stand by and see such a crime committed; still I don't just see how we could influence that pack of hyenas!"

He pointed to a group of men as he spoke, who were crossing the street dragging a man between them.

The group was composed of six men, and the mayor and Dan Wilders were among them.

They had knives in their hands, and were yelling like Indians.

Suddenly Davis gave a jump that nearly took him out of his saddle. He had discovered Panther making his way up the road, and in a second there was a roar from the mob and a lull in the proceedings.

"Hi, there! What ther devil be you cusses doin'?" howled the fellow, as his horse backed near the bonfire, and nearly unseated him.

"It's Nig Hankinson! He's struck it rich an' won't divvy!" was the answer in the mayor's voice; "we're goin' ter burn ther cuss fer bein' so stingy!"

"Reckon yer air a pack er fools fer doin' it!" bawled Panther, promptly. "Let ther whelp alone! He'll come ter his senses ter-morrer! Thar's other

work cut out fer ther lot of yer besides roastin' ther nigger. Them thar Pinkerton sleuths air in ther Settlement this hyar blessed minute!"

The howl that followed made the detectives pale a little, but they strained their ears to hear what followed.

"Who told yer thet thar?"

"Whar hev yer been, Panther?"

"Reckon, now, ef thar was sleuths about, some on us would know it!"

These remarks followed each other, and then came Panther's explanation.

"Jess hid money back yonder by ther old dugout, and ther Pinkerton sleuths knew it! They've been hangin' round ther place all day—ask Mad Mag if they haven't—and to-night at sundown ther cusses come ter Lame-Horse. It's my opinion you'll find 'em somewhere around ther hospital. The whelps air layin' fer Jess, an'——"

There was another yell, and Nig Hankinson was forgotten.

As one man the entire mob swept down the road toward the hospital, and the detectives promptly made a move toward the other end of the alley.

Nig Hankinson had been tied to the stake, but the pile had not been fired.

The detectives could see him huddled in a heap, with the glare of the bonfire playing over him.

"I'm going to cut the fellow loose, and give him his chance," said Star, quickly. "If he tells where the stuff is, so much the better! We'll find Jess in that vicinity, in my opinion!"

He headed his horse toward the road, and was about to put it over a dilapidated fence, when Davis uttered a word of warning.

Another rider had just accomplished the feat a couple hundred feet farther up, and was making toward the negro at a headlong gallop.

"It's Jess! He's after the nigger! Come on!" yelled Star, and the next instant the two men, leaping across the row of yards and depending upon their horses to steer them through the piles of rubbish.

CHAPTER VI.

JESSE JAMES TO THE RESCUE.

Star might have reached the road in time to get a shot at the outlaw, but the glare from the bonfire dazzled the stallion's eyes, and just as it reached the

last fence it stumbled and threw him. He was back in the saddle in a minute, but the horse was nervous, and before he could put him over the last fence the outlaw had escaped him.

"He's taken Nig with him! Hang it! That's just our luck!" growled Davis, as the outlaw's horse could be heard galloping down the road.

"He's going to bully Nig into telling where his stuff is hid! Come on; there's more'n one way to skin a pig!" yelled Star, heading straight for the hospital.

Davis followed him, but there was a queer sensation at his heart. He felt sure that his chum had lost his senses.

The mob had found the hospital empty by this time, and a new current of feeling had set.

It seemed to dawn upon them all at once that Jesse James had turned traitor, and both the mayor and Dan Wilders had expressed their opinions.

"Hang the robber! He's standin' in with Nig, I reckon! We was fools ter protect ther mis'able rascal! Git er move on, men, an' search ther Settlement! If we find ther cuss he'll get some of Nig's punishment!"

"I'm fer tarrin' and featherin' ther viper, cuss him! I 'low, tho', he's skipped by this time, an' with ther stuff, too, plague take him!"

And just at this stage the detectives came upon the scene, and Star gave a shout that was like the blast of a trumpet.

"Whoop! Hi, there! Citizens of this hyar Lame-Hoss Settlement! Yer've been took fer a lot o' fools an' igiots! Jess James has corralled Nig Hankinson's yaller while yer was burnin' yer bonfires an' threatenin' ther feller! Git er move on, men! Ther scamp's jest passed down ther road yonder! He's took Nig on ther saddle with him, so we may ketch ther robber!"

"Who be yer, stranger?" asked the mayor, sharply, as he paused for just a second with one foot in the stirrup.

"He's ther enemy of Jesse James an' all stingy cusses like Nig Hankinson!" bawled Davis promptly. "Git er move on, pardners! Time enough to ask questions when we've bagged Jess and corralled that thar yaller!"

"I reckon they're right, whoever they be! Come on, pards! We're losin' time!" cried Dan Wilders, moving forward.

"It's ther sleuthhounds! I know 'em both! Look out fer 'em, pards!" yelled Panther at that minute.

There was a halt that brought Dan Wilders directly abreast of Star. The detective leaned forward in his saddle and roared an answer:

"Better look out fer that thar knave, Dan Wilders! I heard him swearin' ter-day ter steal your daughter! Come ahead, men! Time enough to settle with us when we've caught that robber!"

Dan Wilders drew back where he could get a look at Panther, and in another second the mayor and Star were leading the mob, many of whom were on foot, past the blazing bonfire.

"Which way'd they go, stranger?" asked the mayor of Star.

The detective pointed to a narrow path, leading back between the shanties.

It was the path the miners always took when they went back into the mountains.

"Thet thar means that ther cuss has hid ther stuff in ther ground, I reckon," went on the mayor. "Cuss Jess! It'll be too bad if he gits thet thar boodle! And ter think we was tryin' ter perfect ther traitor."

"He's a bad lot! There's a good many thousands offered for his head! We mustn't let him escape!" muttered Star, staring hard at the bushes.

"Reckon you be a sleuth," said the mayor, leaning toward him.

Star gave him a quick glance, and saw the hatred gleaming in his eyeballs.

He pricked up his horse and evaded the question.

"Reckon I don't have to be a sleuth to hate Jess, do I?" he said, slowly.

"Hang the thief! He's getting more than his share of plunder, stranger!"

What the mayor might have done no one could say, with accuracy, if Dan Wilders had not forged ahead just then with a vicious announcement.

"Reckon thet thar'll teach ther whelps a lesson! I've left him in ther road, with er bullet in his carcass! He may be dead or not, I couldn't wait ter see, mayor!"

"You mean yer've shot Panther?"

"Thet thar's what I mean! Hold on there, pard! Look out fer ther gully!"

The rumseller spoke just in time, and Star reined in the stallion. Another second and he would have had an ugly fall into an artificial gully.

They were several hundred yards up the path now, and it was as dark as a pocket, besides the path was growing narrower and the inclines were steep and dangerous.

Star called a halt and Davis lighted a match, and, holding it in his hand, slipped lightly from the saddle.

"He's ahead, all right! There's his tracks!" he said, decidedly. "The outlaw was in the rear; there are three others ahead of him."

"They're making for the cut! Reckon Jess means to break fer t'other side of ther mountains," said the mayor.

"Send ther women back, Dan Wilders. Thar ain't no use in more'n a dozen comin'!"

The rumseller turned his horse as best he could in the narrow pass, with the effect that the mob that had been struggling up the hill turned back, with a howl, leaving only a dozen mounted men in all in the posse.

Then they pressed ahead, striking a wider trail farther on, and being sure that they were still following the trail of the outlaws.

It was a novel position for the detectives, but they felt tolerably safe.

By inciting the natives against the outlaw gang they were fairly sure of their friendship.

When the mayor's horse suddenly stumbled over something at a turn in the pass, both Dan Wilders and Davis dropped to the ground to inspect it.

A howl of surprise from Wilders gave Star a hint of what was coming, so he was ready for the turn of sentiment which followed his chum's announcement.

"It's Nig Hankinson, men! The fellow's been blackjacked! Whoop! Look, men! Here's his gold! The stuff is scattered all over him!"

In a second every man was on the ground except Star, and Wilders had lighted a bit of brush in order to examine the negro closely.

Several ounces of gold dust were scattered over his clothes, and his right hand, which was growing limp, held a fair-sized nugget.

"Haw! Haw! Ther skunk would er fooled us, pards!" roared the mayor. "He had ther stuff sewed inter his clothes! We was er pack er fools not ter examine thet thar nor'wester! Reckon ther stuff would er been lost ef we'd er roasted ther feller!"

"It's lost now if Jesse James has got it!" said Star, severely. "There's only a few hundred dollars' worth there! You said he had five thousand!"

This remark stirred them up again, and the men would have remounted their horses if some one had not asked who was to carry the nugget.

Star and Davis got a look at each other as this question was being answered, and Davis got into his saddle and moved ahead a little.

"Reckon I'm ther man ter handle thet thar lump," began the mayor, pompously. "Ther nugget will be at my office ter-morrer, and them as is hyar ter-night will come in fer their divvy."

"I 'low thet thar would be fair if we didn't know yer, Jim Pilley," growled the "judge" in the group behind him.

"Who says I ain't honest?" asked the mayor, furiously.

Star and Davis moved on a step farther in the path, and both took sharp glances along the path before them.

"I 'low ye're too free with them thar insinuashins, Jedge Jones! What ther dickens do yer mean?" roared the mayor, more viciously.

What would have happened next was easily guessed if a third member of the gang had not put an end to the altercation.

Reaching forward quickly, he grabbed the nugget, and, making a flying leap for his saddle, dashed back down the mountain.

The thing was done so quickly that the men were paralyzed for a second; then their pistols spoke sharply, and were echoed through the settlement.

The stallion made a leap forward, and Star did not restrain it. In a minute he had turned a bend in the path and, with Davis at his heels, was thundering along the base of the second incline.

Two minutes passed before Davis even looked back over his shoulder. When he did he saw that they were not being pursued.

The natives of Lame-Horse had gone back after the fellow with the nugget, and were doubtless having a free fight in the road at that minute.

Star stopped after that, and they both examined the tracks.

They were pleased to find that the outlaws were ahead, and making for what looked like better country; there were fewer trees and, as the moon was bright, it would render their flight a little safer.

"By Jove! I'm glad to be free from that cutthroat crew!" said Davis, drawing a long breath. "That

was the prettiest bluff you ever chucked, Star! Gee! But what a strain! I'm all of a tremble!"

"Sh! Don't talk out loud! It was a good bluff, and a successful one!" said Star, softly; "Jess is out of the hospital, and we are free of those rascals, now there's another chance for the government's ten thousand."

"Where do you suppose this path leads to?" asked Davis, suddenly. It was nearly daylight now, and they could see some distance ahead of them.

Star turned another bend, and saw that the path was beginning to descend.

Pulling a small compass from his pocket, he consulted that and the heavens.

Suddenly a sharp exclamation arose to his lips, and he brought the stallion almost to its haunches.

"By thunder! It leads straight to Squire Thompson's ranch, by the Lone Injun trail! Of course, Jess would go there. He thinks his wife will be waiting for him. He don't know the tables have turned, and that she is a prisoner!"

"Then shall we go on?" asked Davis, who was a bit rattled.

"Sure! The girls are there, and so are Peek and Lent! They'll be surprised to see us so soon, but the shock won't hurt them!"

"I should say not, especially if Jesse James gets there a few minutes first," laughed Davis. "I rather think they'll be glad to see us! Now, who and what is Squire Thompson, partner?"

Star guided the stallion down the incline, keeping one eye on the hoofprints ahead as he answered briefly:

"A tenderfoot ranchman! Brand new to this section! He wouldn't know Jesse James from a traveling clergyman. I reckon Jess could steal the ranch and everything on it, but he won't get the chance if I can help it."

After that there was little said, the detectives saving their breath for what was coming.

Once down the mountain, the riding was easier, and five miles from the ranch they struck open prairie.

Here they ran across a couple of tourists, who had been lost for twenty-four hours in the mountains. They were good-looking fellows, wearing tweed business suits, and derby hats, and Star promptly effected a bargain with them. He gave them his compass, a map and a hundred dollars in gold as an in-

ducement to make them swap hats, coats and trousers. Then he advised them to strike east, and thus avoid the Lam-Horse Settlement, and, as there was a more civilized community of miners in that direction, the tenderfeet were only too willing to adopt the suggestion.

Davis had let his mustache grow and Star had a good growth on his chin, which they hoped would help in their new disguises.

When they started on again, they felt confident and even elated.

The tracks were still ahead of them, so there was no time lost.

Jesse James had a way of always getting to a spot first, and being about to leave at the minute of their arrival, and the detectives did not mean this to happen on this occasion.

There was no stop except to water the horses at a spring, but the brave fellows found a plenty of fruit for their breakfasts which could be jerked from the branches of the trees in passing.

Davis was already beginning to worry about Flora, and his heart thumped considerably when they came in sight of a herd of cattle which told them they were nearing Squire Thompson's dwelling.

"Hello! the outlaws have breakfasted," observed Star, suddenly, at the same time pointing to a group of Herefords.

"That's so! Some of the cows have been milked and some of them haven't, and there are no end of tracks about here," responded Davis.

Star examined the tracks critically and then pressed on.

Half-a-mile further, he came upon another herd of shorthorns, with a dozen cowboys behind them mounted upon bronchos.

In a second every man of them had his hand upon his pistol, but Star pulled off his hat promptly and saluted.

"We're looking for Squire Thompson's. Reckon we're on the right road, ain't we?" he asked.

There was a short consultation among the "punchers," and then one of them rode forward.

"We've been warned to look out for some one, so you'd best give your names and business with the squire," he said, politely.

Star understood, at once, and smiled as he responded:

"We are looking for the two young ladies with

their escorts who arrived at the ranch last night. They had another woman with them—the wife of Jesse James, the outlaw.”

Star had his eyes on the fellow's face as he spoke, but, in spite of his cleverness, he failed to detect a change in his features.

Instead, the fellow merely made a gesture for them to pass, and promptly wheeled his broncho so that his back was toward them.

The two detectives rode on, picking their way through the herd, and, after they had passed, they looked back over their shoulders.

What they saw made them open their eyes in wonder.

The group of cowpunchers had huddled themselves together in a bunch and were fairly shaking their ponies as they rocked with laughter.

“What the deuce does that mean?” began Davis, nervously.

Star shook his head.

It was too hard a riddle.

He spent the rest of the time before the ranch house was sighted in trying to solve it.

Both detectives had been thinking that they had a good chance now to find Jesse James, especially as Peek and Lent were on the ground to help them.

The meeting with the punchers cast a gloom over their spirits.

They were by far too good detectives not to feel the influence of presentiments.

CHAPTER VII.

THE THOMPSON RANCH.

They passed innumerable stables and sheds and a fair-sized corral full of yearling thoroughbreds before they discovered the ranch house proper.

It was a one-story building, covering considerable ground, and the yard in front had a formidable fence around it.

“There's nobody stirring! They must take life easy on Thompson's ranch,” said Davis, a little curiously.

Star had discovered something, and there was a frown over his features.

“There's the end of the tracks, Davis!” he said, briefly; “Jess has put his horses in those stables yonder, just as sure as shooting!”

“Impossible!”

That was all Davis could say, but he began to feel uneasy.

Star bent lower in the saddle and examined the tracks.

They were the same ones that they had been following all the way from the Lane-Horse Settlement.

“It's deucedly queer! Wonder if Jess is a friend of the squire? If he is, there's trouble ahead, and we're in for it, neck and ears,” said Davis, after a minute.

Star took another look at the house, and gave a low whistle.

“Looks like a prison, with the shutters all closed,” he said, dubiously. “I'd give a thousand dollars for a glimpse of the girls now! Thunderation! I hope the poor things are safe! Suppose that woman should have fooled us after all our planning?”

“You mean Mrs. James? It hardly seems possible.”

Davis went up to one of the stable doors and put out his hand to try it as he spoke.

Instantly, his eye caught the muzzle of a rifle protruding through a hole in the door, and he reined his mount out of range with a sharp exclamation.

“Gee! the rascals are inside there! Get over to the ranch house and wake up the squire! Ten to one they're planning to empty his stables!”

“Funny those punchers didn't see them,” began Star, as he moved forward. “Jess may have fooled them! He's a quick-tongued sinner! I'll keep an eye on the stables while you pound the door! Jimminy! I hope they don't come out before we get some one to help us!”

Star had reached the door and was pounding on it with the butt of his pistol and yelling for Peek Watson. There was no reply, and he gave a shout of warning.

“Hi, there! Open your door, Squire Thompson! Your beasts are in danger! There are thieves in the stables!”

The words were hardly out of his mouth before the door flew open.

A man in outlaw garb stood upon the threshold with his hand upon the butt of a businesslike-looking pistol.

“Much obliged, young man. I'll look after ther rascals!” he said, affably. “Reckon, now, yer'll give me a little help with ther cusses, bein' as how ther

squire is sick and ther punchers hev gone ter pastur'!"

Star had taken a good look at the man, and was doing some rapid thinking, but, as his wits were not quite quick enough to identify the fellow, he felt obliged to asquiesce in the suggestion.

"They're in ther first stable," said Davis, who had hardly looked at the fellow. "I reckon it's Jesse James and his gang, and you know what that means, stranger!"

He turned his head as he spoke, and the fellow shut the door behind him.

Davis gave him a second look, and then smothered a low whistle.

"Are you one of the squire's men?" asked Star, at that minute.

"I reckon I be," was the answer, as the vicious-faced giant cocked his weapon. "I'm the highcockalorum of this hyar ranch, stranger! Ther squire's a tenderfoot without pluck or gumption! I 'low, now, Jesse James could swaller ther ranch hull, if he took a notion!"

"Exactly what I thought," said Star, in a wonderfully calm voice.

He knew he was in a bad mess, and was trying to think how to get out of it, and just then the fellow took a step forward so that Star got a better look at him.

"There's only one man in the world with shoulders like that," was his mental observation. "That fellow is a member of the James gang, and his name is Bink Barrows."

This knowledge would have served to make most men nervous, but Star was always coolest in times of danger.

The next instant Bink Barrows turned and looked sharply at the stallion.

"How do you like the beast?" asked the detective, coolly. "It belongs to Jesse James! The creature was stolen from him by a couple of sleuths, they tell me."

There was another sharp look, and Bink Barrows took a step backward, motioning at the same time for the detectives to go forward.

"That won't do! Fair play, stranger!" said Star, promptly, as he held in the stallion. "'Tain't likely we'd warn you that there were thieves on the premises if we were here on the same errand. We want

to see Squire Thompson and the two young ladies who arrived here last evening."

"We'll deal with whoever is yonder, fust," was the outlaw's answer; "after that, you kin come inside an' welcome."

The little chuckle that accompanied the words made Star suspicious and he promptly dropped his hand to his revolver.

"I'll be hanged if I will! I'll see the squire first," he said, savagely. "You may be all right, stranger, but I don't like your manners."

"Then go to blazes, curse you!" was the outlaw's quick rejoinder, and, putting his finger to his lips the fellow gave a shrill whistle.

The stable door flew open instantly and another roughly-clad man came out, armed with a rifle.

Star glanced at him for the fraction of a second, and then set his teeth. The fellow was Dead-Shot Bill, the bogus Indian.

This was enough to explain their dangerous position.

"Hanged if we ain't run into another trap," he muttered. "This ranch belongs to Jesse James, and those two girls inside are prisoners, to say nothing of the others."

The thought was horrible, but it inspired him to prompt action, and, just as Bink Barrows dropped the trigger of his weapon, the detective's spoke also.

The stallion jumped at that second, and Star felt a sharp pain in his arm.

It was only a flesh wound, however, and as Dead-Shot Bill and Davis made targets of each other he got a bead on Bink Barrows over the tail of the stallion.

Crack!

Crack!

Their weapons spoke simultaneously once more, and at that second the stallion's heels flew out and struck the outlaw fairly in the stomach.

Both shots had gone wild, but the stallion won the day.

Bink landed on his back fully twenty feet away, and Star was carried a hundred yards before he could control the vicious creature.

Meanwhile Davis and Dead-Shot had been blazing away at each other, but, although both had been scratched twice, they were still sound and active.

The stallion's rush had placed Dead-Shot between

two fires, and as quick as he saw it he threw up both hands and surrendered.

Star rode up to him and took his weapons, which consisted of a brace of fine Colt's revolvers.

"Now, then, get inside there, you cur!" said Star, pointing to the stable.

Dead-Shot sneaked in like a whipped dog, and, after Star had seen to it that there were no firearms in the stable, he came out and locked the fellow in with a couple of winded bronchos.

"Now, we'll investigate the house! We must move fast, Davis, or the punchers will be back!" he said, as he slid the bolt.

Davis had tied his handkerchief over a flesh wound just above his wrist, and was quietly reloading his trusty weapons.

Star tied the stallion to the fence, and then went up to the door.

He shook and rattled the latch and then kicked the panels, but there was not a sound of any kind in answer.

"It can't be possible that Jess has gone on and taken the women with him, can it? Look yonder, Davis, and see if any tracks lead out of the yard. We may be losing time by stopping here a minute longer."

Davis started upon a tour of investigation, passing near Bink as he went.

The outlaw was as white as a corpse and groaning horribly.

"He's done for, I guess. It's awful to see a man suffer like that, no matter whether he deserves it or not," he muttered, turning his head so as not to see him.

When he came back he reported no fresh tracks visible.

There were old ones that had evidently been made the day previous.

Star started pounding again, and finally a shutter at the right of the door opened.

The detectives glanced in that direction and saw a stern-faced, elderly woman staring at them.

"It's Mrs. Samuels!" muttered Star, under his breath. "That settles it, Davis—the ranch belongs to Jess! I'd know her anywhere; she's the rascal's mother."

"Who are you?" asked Mrs. Samuels, holding the shutter open just far enough for them to see her face.

"We're looking for Squire Thompson," answered

Davis, promptly; "we have business with him. Is he inside there, madam?"

"What was that firing about?" was the old woman's next question.

Star looked her squarely in the eye and answered, promptly:

"A fight between us and two robbers, madam! Squire Thompson is a strange man to harbor outlaws."

The shutter was closed with a slam, and the detectives could hear voices inside.

The next minute it was opened again, and Mrs. James looked out at them.

"Ha! ha! so you think you can deceive us do you? You'll not find Jesse James here!" she said, in a gay voice. "And as for the young ladies, they have gone back to Nevada City. It was all I could do to repay them for their pity the night when they thought I was your prisoner in the mountains."

The detectives looked at each other, and Mrs. James let out another ripple of laughter.

She seemed to be enjoying the trick she had played upon them, and allowed the shutter to swing open in a reckless manner.

"Your companions went with them—at the point of a pistol," she went on, more soberly. "Now, I advise you to go or you will meet with disaster. My mother and myself want none of your company, and if you have killed our men we shall be obliged to protect ourselves from you!"

The shining barrel of a revolver flashed in the sunlight as she spoke, and the muzzle of a forty-two caliber weapon was turned upon them.

Davis drew back instantly, and Star followed, grinding his teeth. They could neither of them bear the thought of harming a woman.

Mrs. James allowed the shutter to swing back, and her husband's mother appeared beside her.

The gray-haired old woman was holding a Winchester repeater steadily to her shoulder.

"They mean business, Star! No use to monkey around there any longer," said Davis. "Now, where the devil are Lent and Watson? I'm not ready to believe they've made tracks from this section."

"I'd rather believe that than what I think is the case," answered Star, very soberly.

"You mean you think they're inside there?" asked Davis, growing white around the lips.

"I believe they are dead. Jesse James nor no one else could make them forsake the girls, and I'm sure those infamous wretches would never give up two young women!"

Star glanced around as he spoke, in the hope of seeing something to encourage him, and a second later a shutter on the other side of the door began to tremble.

There was no such thing as approaching the house from the front, and as the rotten boards suddenly sprung out a little from the wall he began to move slowly toward the angle of the building.

A minute later something white fluttered from the window and fell to the ground.

Star moved a little faster and got around to the side; then, making a quick rush close to the building, he picked up a handkerchief and dashed back into safety before the two women had seen him.

Unrolling a corner of the handkerchief, he found a bit of paper, upon which these words had been scratched with a burned match:

We are here, safe. Lent and Watson being tortured.

The words seemed to burn into his brain and made him sick at heart as he read them.

A moment later, he was repeating them in an undertone to his companion.

"Something must be done! If they had only told us who else was inside!" began Davis.

Whether Mrs. James was suspicious of what had happened or not, the detectives could not tell, but just at that moment she closed the shutter.

"Now's our time! Get up on my shoulder and force that shutter," cried Star, softly.

He made a dash for the window behind which the girls were imprisoned, and, just as Davis sprang upon his back, they heard the distant yell of the punchers.

"Quick! wrench it off! Those fellows are coming!" cried Star, as he grabbed his friend by the feet and helped to steady him in his precarious position.

Davis gave the shutter a jerk that pulled it from its hinges, and, as it fell to the ground, there was a cry from Flora Peters.

The detective smashed the small window with one jab of his elbow, and the next minute Flora was lifted to the ground down the human ladder.

Ada followed, and then the four made a dash for safety, just as Mrs. James burst into the room, to find that her prisoners had escaped her.

"Now, we've got to get out of here lively! The punchers are coming!" cried Star. "We'll each take a girl and break for the woods! When they are safely hidden, we'll come back for the others."

Fortunately the stallion had been tied out of range of the windows, and Star and Miss Peters were quickly in the saddle.

Davis was not so fortunate, for his horse was directly before the door, and Mrs. James was watching it with the eye of an eagle.

Burst in the stable door! There's something in the shape of horseflesh inside!" yelled Star.

The detective tried it, but the door would not yield.

Picking up a hammer that lay near the door, he smashed the padlock to atoms.

The next minute he and Ada were on the back of Queen Bess, a beautiful thoroughbred that Jesse James had stolen during one of his rides through Colorado.

With an almost forlorn hope in his heart, Davis dashed after Star.

They had one fence to leap and the corral to pass, then there was a mile of smooth country before the woods would shelter them.

He had just driven his spurs home to put the thoroughbred over the fence when howls, yells and cries seemed to come from all directions.

Queen Bess landed safely and started after the stallion, but, fifty feet from the fence, Davis was obliged to pull her to her haunches.

A bullet, coming from the corral, passed within an inch of her nose.

A second later, and it would have been driven through the body of one of her riders.

The detective turned involuntarily to see who had fired the shot, and at that second Star turned and yelled over his shoulder.

"It's Jess! Lie low, Davis, and ride like the devil! It's our only chance! We are completely surrounded!"

CHAPTER VIII.

SQUIRE THOMPSON.

The order was a wise one and Davis dashed forward with bullets whizzing around his ears from a dozen directions.

Fortunately, Star had shot one of the punchers who guarded that particular point, and killed the

horse of a second, so Davis and Ada were soon sufficiently far ahead to be out of reach of the others.

They galloped on with the punchers hot on their heels, until the fringe of woods was passed, and they were able to put a clump of big-trunked trees between them and their pursuers.

"Halt! Hold on, Star! They've stopped!" called Davis, looking back over his shoulder.

Star turned in his saddle without decreasing the speed of the stallion.

"By Jove! so they have! Now, what the deuce does that mean, I wonder? Jess isn't with them! The fellow must have been skulking in the corral! Wish we'd have known that fact a little sooner!"

"He went out there some time ago to look over the horses," said Flora, faintly.

She had been clinging to Star's belt, and was badly out of breath with the hard riding.

"Frank James was in the house—he and the two women!" cried Ada. "Oh, it was awful when we got there! I nearly went mad when I found that we were prisoners!"

"Didn't the boys put up a fight?" asked Davis, after he had made sure that the punchers were retreating.

"They didn't know we had been tricked until we were inside; then some one turned the key on them," was the angry answer.

"And they are in there now——" began Star, with an anxious expression creeping over his features.

"Yes! The outlaws have been torturing them. I don't know how! They were locked in the next room, but we heard groans and curses! Oh, we must go back at once!" cried Ada, excitedly.

Star had brought his mount to a standstill at last in order to talk a minute.

He was upon the horns of a dilemma.

The girls must be cared for before he could attempt to rescue his comrades.

"There's only one thing to do—we must get help," he said, decidedly. "The boys will have to wait while we hurry to Bullion City."

There was a cry from both girls, but the detective was decided.

Ten minutes later they were in the very heart of the hills, dashing at breakneck speed toward the northwest, where, some twenty miles away, there was another mining settlement.

The hours seemed like days, but they reached the group of cabins at last, and found a modest number of law-loving people.

Delay after delay arose, but Star finally succeeded in getting up a posse of twenty men.

Leaving the girls with an honest miner, they set back once more toward the ranch, expecting nothing more than to find that Jesse James had again moved his quarters, as he had done many times before when they thought they had cornered him.

By this time the news of the outlaw's visit to Lame-Horse had been noised abroad, and a dozen parties set out from various directions to hunt for the express box containing the thirty thousand dollars.

Who was responsible for the locating of the latter no one knew, but the detectives were of the opinion that Mad Mag had spread the story.

What concerned the detectives most was that their own posse was so eager to go in search of the money that they had hard work to keep them after Jesse James, and they finally agreed to give them the government's ten thousand dollars outright, if they would concentrate their energies upon killing the outlaw.

Not a man was seen about the ranch as the posse approached it, but the cattle were feeding in the pastures, and the corral was as full as ever.

Star galloped up to the door with a revolver in his hand, and at the very first knock the door was opened.

A gentlemanly-appearing man who looked like an Easterner was standing inside, and, except for a look of surprise, he seemed fairly genial.

"Who the devil are you?" asked Star, entirely taken by surprise.

"Hardly the way for a gentleman to ask a question," was the good-natured answer. "Who are you that you come with a weapon in your hand and a posse of cutthroats behind you?"

Star saw that things had changed about the place, so he told his story briefly.

Then both he and Davis showed their detective badges.

The men from Bullion City identified themselves, and then, at a gesture from the man in the doorway, every member of the posse put up his weapon.

"Your story explains a good deal, young man," he said, sternly. "I have been away from home for a

week and came back this morning, only to find my wife and children prisoners, and my home dismantled. Twelve men whom I left on my ranch have deserted in my absence, and each, as you may suppose, has taken a thoroughbred mare with him. In the house are two men, both strangers to me——"

"Whoop! Thank Heaven! So they're alive, are they!" yelled Davis, at this mention of his companions.

"Very much alive, thank you, old man," called out Lent's voice, at that minute. "Jesse James left us for dead at daylight this morning, but, thanks to this noble man, who did not know us from Adam, we're on deck again and doing nicely!"

"Star stepped inside as he spoke, and held out his hand impulsively.

The owner of the ranch took it quietly, and then went on, with dignity:

"I was suspicious of your friends until I saw their injuries; then, as my wife told me, she had been harboring several strange women, I decided that there was a bigger mystery on my hands than I could solve alone, and that led me to do my best to restore these two to consciousness."

"He's a trump! Allow me to introduce him, old man!" said Lent, hobbling forward. "He's Squire Thompson, of Maine, and a right royal good fellow."

"Then the ranch didn't belong to Jess, after all," broke in Davis.

"He took possession as though it did. He bribed my men and made prisoners of my women! Curse the rascal! I'd go after him myself, but I dare not leave my ranch in this condition! I have seven hundred head of cattle and about seventy-five horses, and just at this minute I am without a puncher."

"That settles it, sir! You have been kind to our friends, and we will repay the courtesy," said Star, promptly. "We'll stay and help you until you can hire a new crew; after that, we'll go on after that rascally robber!"

The posse agreed, and every man but one remained.

The one went back to Bullion City and brought the two girls, picking up a minister on the way and adding him to the party.

He was able to trace Jesse James and his party a good part of the way, and reported that the outlaw had taken a westerly direction, which showed that he was looking for fresh fields to conquer.

That night while a sentry remained on guard outside there were two weddings performed in the ranch-house.

Flora and Davis were married first, and then Ada and Peek followed, the young girl having decided that she loved him during the time they were both imprisoned and Jesse James was torturing him.

After that both injured men were put under a doctor's care, and it was two weeks before they could be moved to Nevada City.

Besides several minor pistol wounds they had been cut and gashed with knives, but they were both well enough in three months to think of joining Star and Davis.

Some time elapsed before they heard of Jesse James again, but when they did he was still in California and had added another large sum to his plundered fortunes.

What became of the express box no one ever knew, but it was presumed that Jesse recovered it safely, for he was not the man to let such a sum as that slip through his fingers.

Panther had not been killed by Dan Wilders, and the two men soon made up.

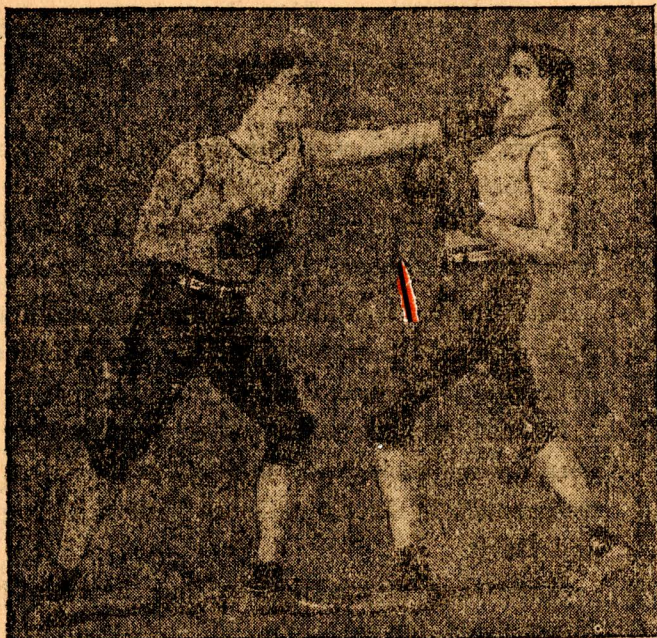
When Star next heard of them, they had joined the James gang, and Bess Wilders was left to the mercy of the Lam-Horse Settlement.

The detective tried hard to get on the track of the girl, but as he did not relish the thought of another visit to Lam-Horse, he finally dropped her from his list of responsibilities.

Bink Barrows died, no one heard exactly where, but his remains arrived one morning in Sacramento City, and somebody claimed a reward for his body.

THE END.

Next week's issue (No. 41) will contain "The James Boys in Mexico; or, The Raiders of the Rio Grande." After leaving Squire Thompson's ranch, Jesse and Frank James started immediately for the Mexican border. You will read of his adventures with Palacia, the great Mexican outlaw, in next week's issue.



Boxing Contest

COME ON, BOYS, FOR A NEW
CONTEST THIS WEEK.

**TWO PUNCHING BAGS
AND 15 SETS OF BOXING
GLOVES GIVEN AWAY!**

The Deeds of Famous Men Contest ended last week, and we've got a new contest that we know you'll take right hold of and make even a bigger success than the last. This is a

BOXING CONTEST

We don't wish you to sail in and box with each other, although you can do that, too, if you wish. We want you to give us a Description of the Best Boxing Match you have ever witnessed or taken part in. You all know how to box—all Jesse James Weekly boys can handle their fists well and we want you to tell us How It Is Done.

The Prizes

TWO FIRST-CLASS
SPALDING PUNCHING BAGS
COMPLETE OUTFIT.

FIFTEEN SETS OF
SPALDING BOXING GLOVES

The two boys who write the best stories will each receive a Spalding "Expert" Punching Bag, made of finest selected Napa tan leather. The workmanship is the same as in the Fitzsimmons special bag. Double-stitched, welted seams, re-inforced one-piece top. Best quality Para rubber bladder. An extremely durable and lively bag, and carefully selected before packing. Each bag complete in box with bladder, rubber cord for floor and rope for ceiling attachment. The four next best stories will win for their writers sets of Spalding regulation 5 oz. boxing gloves.

TWO PAIRS OF GLOVES TO EACH SET.

Made after the Corbett pattern of soft craven tan leather, well-padded, with elastic wrist bands.

There will be eleven prizes in the third class. Eleven sets of **two pair** of Spalding boxing gloves. Regular pattern, made of light-colored soft tanned leather, well-padded, elastic wristbands. These bags and gloves are

The Best that can be obtained anywhere.
They are well worth trying for. . . .

How to Get Them

Think of any exciting boxing bout you have witnessed or participated in. Sit down and write as good a description of it as you know how. Make it lively. Throw in all the upper cuts and half arm jolts, and do it in five hundred words or less.

THERE ARE NINETEEN PRIZES

and every boy who has ever seen a boxing contest has a chance to capture one of them. The contest may be between boys or men, beginners or well-known amateurs. If you should not win a prize you stand a good chance of seeing your story and name in print, anyway.

To become a contestant you must cut out the Boxing Contest Coupon on this page, fill it out properly, and send it to JESSE JAMES WEEKLY, 238 William Street, New York City, together with your article.

No contribution without this coupon will be considered. Come along boys and make things hum.

This Contest Closes May 1, 1902.

COUPON.

JESSE JAMES WEEKLY BOXING CONTEST.

Date.....

Name.....

City or Town.....

State.....

DEEDS OF FAMOUS MEN.

Of course you know all about the splendid new contest we announce on the opposite page. The Deeds of Famous Men Contest is now closed, and we will announce the winners in two weeks. We have had so many dandy stories that it's hard to pick out the best. Here are some of the late arrivals:

Andrew Jackson.

(By E. C. Angel, Ohio.)

Andrew Jackson served first in the Revolutionary War, in which he was taken a prisoner. One night a British officer ordered Andy to clean his boots.

"Sir, I am a prisoner of war," said Andy. "And it is not my place to clean boots."

The officer grew angry and struck him twice with his sword. Andrew carried the scars to his grave.

Jackson fought again in the war of 1812. The last battle of the war took place at New Orleans, on Sunday morning, January 8, 1815. The British sent a rocket whizzing through the air as a signal for the attack on the Americans. In front of Jackson's guns was a ditch with a wall on one side. Before the battle Jackson walked along among his men.

"Stand to your guns," he said. "See that every shot tells. Give it to them, boys."

Well, we all know the "boys" did give it to them. In less than half an hour the great battle was over. The British were brave fellows and were not afraid to die. They fought desperately; they tried again and again to cross the ditch, but the guns of the Americans cut them down in rows just as the mower does grain.

Jackson won the battle. The American loss was eight killed and thirteen wounded; the British loss was two thousand killed and wounded.

Nathan Hale.

(By William B. Styers, Pa.)

One of the martyrs of the Revolutionary War was Nathan Hale, a young Connecticut soldier. He was a studious young man who had been through college and loved his books, but went into the army because he wished to serve his country.

General Washington needed some one to make his way into the enemy's camp on Long Island, find out how many soldiers there were, and how they were placed. Hale volunteered to go. It was a dangerous business. He would be a spy, and men do not praise spies; but he said, "Every kind of service necessary to the public good becomes honorable by being necessary."

A friend begged him not to go.

"I will reflect," he said, "and do nothing which I do not feel to be my duty." He decided to go. He took note of all he saw, and was making his way across the ferry to New York when he was discovered by a Tory who knew him, and was carried to the British commander. It was useless for him to deny his business, for

his papers were found upon him. He was a brave fellow, and made no excuses for himself.

The commander gave orders that he should be hanged. He was a rebel and a spy; therefore he was not even to be tried. He was not to be shot like a soldier; he was not allowed to write to his mother; he was not allowed to have a Bible to read.

He asked to have a clergyman visit him, but his request was refused. He was hanged like a base criminal, but he said, with a clear voice just before he was hanged, "I regret that I have but one life to give for my country."

Abraham Lincoln.

(By William Wilson, Washington, D. C.)

Abraham Lincoln, the sixteenth President of the United States, was born in Kentucky, February 12, 1809, of very poor parents.

Lincoln's father could not either read or write, and Lincoln himself received but one year's schooling.

After he had grown up to be a good-sized boy, his father moved down the Ohio River on a floating raft to Indiana.

When Lincoln was nineteen years of age, he was hired out at ten dollars per month as a hand on a flat boat. He made a trip to New Orleans, and on his return he accompanied the family to Illinois, driving the cattle before him on the journey.

After they had reached their destination Lincoln helped his father to build a log cabin to be their dwelling and split rails to enclose the farm. He afterward used to split rails for some of the neighbors. After hard work and perseverance he made a man of himself, and educated himself as a lawyer. He borrowed books of great interest to read from the office where he was employed, and returned them the next morning.

After he was admitted to the bar he arose to great distinction. At twenty-five he was sent to Congress, and was re-elected twice.

During the Black Hawk War he was captain of a company of volunteers, and enlisted on the call for troops when the Mexican war broke out. He served with remarkable bravery in this war. He was soon noticed by the Republicans after the war for his ability, and was elected President in 1860.

Lincoln was very much opposed to slavery, and was determined to break it up. He was a kind, honest and sympathetic man.

His life ended in a sad way. He was very fond of theatres. One night about a month after his second

inauguration he was shot down by Booth, who thought Lincoln was a tyrant.

Both North and South mourned the loss of one of the most faithful men of the Union—soldier, statesman and President.

Life of James A. Garfield.

(By Karl W. Dannenberg, New York.)

The second martyr President of the United States, James A. Garfield, was born in Orange, Cuyahogo County, Ohio, November 19, 1831.

When Garfield was thirteen years old he obtained a position as canal boy. When he worked there about a month he was taken ill, and lay for some months sick at home. After that James Garfield entered Grange Seminary.

Ever since Garfield began to study at Grange Seminary he looked forward to earning a little money by keeping school. When vacation came he carried his plan into effect.

When Garfield graduated from the seminary he entered the Hiram Institute, and when he graduated from Hiram Institute he entered Williams College in Williamstown. Probably young Garfield never passed two happier or more profitable years than at Williams College. In 1856 he graduated, carrying off the highest honors.

In 1856 Garfield became president of Hiram College. In 1859 he was tendered a nomination to the Ohio Senate from the counties of Portage and Summit, and he was elected by a handsome majority.

When the Civil War broke out Garfield was given the lieutenant-colonelcy of the Forty-second Ohio Regiment, and after his campaign in Kentucky he was made general.

After the war Garfield was made Congressman and later on he was elected Senator. On the 8th of June, 1880, the Republican Convention selected Garfield as their standard bearer on the thirty-sixth ballot. State after State declared in his favor, and he was elected President on the second of November, 1880.

He was shot in Washington and died in Elberon, New Jersey, in 1881. He was an honest man who was born poor. From a mule boy on a canal he had become President of the United States.

Samuel Adams.

(By Roy Haynes, Pine Bluff, Ark.)

Samuel Adams was born September 27, 1722, in Boston, Mass. He was one of the most renowned patriots of the American Revolution. He was a great grandson of Henry Adams, an English emigrant, ancestor also of President John Adams.

Samuel received his education at Harvard College, and took the degree of A. M. in 1740. He made various choices of a vocation. He first studied for the bar. Not liking that profession, he made an effort in mercantile business, but found his true sphere in politics, and soon became prominent in the discussions of the important questions then beginning to interest the colonial mind.

He was a member of the Massachusetts legislature, 1766-1774, and as early as 1764 had raised his voice in public protest against the practice of taxation without representation.

In 1774, he was sent to the first Congress of the Confederation, and so important was his action while in that body in his influence in bringing about the final separation of the colonies from the mother country, that, with John Hancock, he was named as an exception to the free offer of pardon made by General Gage to those rebels who should return to their allegiance. He was one of the warmest advocates of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence of which he was also one of the signers.

In 1781 he retired from Congress, and was active in the convention which framed the constitution of Massachusetts, being elected to the State Senate. He presided over the deliberations of that body for several years. In 1789 he was elected Lieutenant-Governor, which office he held till 1794, when, on the death of John Hancock, he was elected Governor, and annually re-elected till 1797, when he retired from public life. In a work by a Mr. Galloway, on the American Revolution, Mr. Adams is thus described: "He eats little, drinks little, sleeps little, thinks much, and is most indefatigable in the pursuit of his object. It was this man who by his superior application, managed, at once the factions in Congress, at Philadelphia and the factions in New England. He was a natural Democrat, and even accused his countrymen of aristocratic tendencies, because of their confidence in Washington, whom he persistently underrated, both as a general and as a statesman. He was narrow in his views and dogmatic in the expression of them, impatient of opposition, and self opinionated; but a man of rare integrity, lowly in principle, of great courage and determination, and splendid fidelity to his connections. He opposed the federal constitution, and, in politics, was a staunch adherent of Jefferson, and of Jeffersonian democracy. In person Adams is described as of medium height, with light complexion and blue eyes, possessing an erect and dignified carriage. His usual costume was a red cloak, tie wig and cocked hat."

Adams was twice married, and it is related that in his early days of wedded life, when he pursued the unprofitable path of politics, his wife supported both him and herself by her own labor. He was never even in comfortable circumstances until the death of a relative, in the latter part of his life, brought him a bequest, sufficient in amount to sustain him.

He wrote numerous State papers of great merit and contributed political articles to the newspaper literature of the day. He died October 2, 1802, leaving one daughter.

Thomas Jefferson.

(By Bridget Cleary, Michigan.)

Thomas Jefferson was the author of the Declaration of Independence. His father was a Virginia planter, and also a surveyor. Thomas was born in 1743. His father died when he was fourteen, and left him the owner of a large plantation.

Like most Virginia boys, he was fond of hunting, riding and swimming, but he did not waste his life in sport.

When he went to college at Williamsburg he became a famous student. Sometimes he studied fifteen hours a day, which would have been too much if he had not been strong. No man in all America, perhaps, was his superior in knowledge.

While yet a young man, he was sent to the Virginia Legislature, and then to Congress. He strongly favored the war of the Revolution. John Adams and others tried to persuade Congress to declare the colonies independent of England. At last a committee was appointed to write the Declaration. Jefferson was not a great speaker, but he was a brilliant writer. He wrote the Declaration of Independence, and it was signed by the members of Congress on the 4th of July, 1776.

Jefferson was Governor of Virginia during part of the Revolutionary War, and he had to make great exertions to defend the State from the British. The British troops at length marched on Monticello, which was his home, and Jefferson had to flee from it.

Two of Jefferson's negro slaves, whose names were Martin and Caesar, made haste to hide their master's silverplate. They had raised a plank in the floor, and Caesar was crouched under the floor hiding the silverware as Martin handed it down to him. Just as the last piece went down, Martin saw the red coats approaching. He dropped the plank, leaving Caesar a prisoner.

After the war Jefferson was sent to take Franklin's

place as American minister to France. He was there five years, when he returned to America.

Jefferson died fifty years after the Declaration of Independence.

Arnold's Treason.

(By S. F. Luterick, Pa.)

General Benedict Arnold, who distinguished himself by his bravery at Quebec and Saratoga, fell into bad habits and became heavily in debt. He went from bad to worse, until at last in order to get money tried to betray his country.

He was placed in command at West Point, the most important fortress on the Hudson River. This he wanted to give up to the English soldiers for £10,000 and a position as general in the British Army. There was a young English officer named Andre, who was to arrange the plans for the act of treachery. Everything was working well and Andre was returning to Sir Henry Clinton with the plans when he was stopped at Tarrytown by three militiamen. Believing that they sided with the English, Andre told them he was a British officer. The men searched him and the plans were found in his stocking. Andre asked to be released, but they took him to the nearest American camp, where he was tried as a spy and hanged. Soon after this Arnold heard of Andre's capture, and fled to New York. He fought in several battles against his own country. He then went to England, where he died in 1801, poor and despised.

TALES OF HUNTING AND TRAPPING.

WOLVES.

By OSCAR BLISS.

My grandfather moved his family to Western New York from New England some seventy years ago, and took up a farm in a beautiful valley, far removed from all neighbors, save the "noble redman" and the howling denizens of the forest.

At that time my father was a boy of fifteen, the eldest of a numerous family of children, but his surroundings tended to develop the latent energies of body and mind of which he was possessed, and very early in life he became noted as a wideawake backwoodsman. In physical strength he was a young Hercules, and weighed, when only eighteen, two hundred and twenty pounds.

Nor was his education neglected, for his father, being an educated man, gave the young giant good opportunities to acquire useful knowledge of which he availed himself with avidity. The family flourished as the years went by, and our father, while yet in his teens, was widely known as one of the most daring and successful trappers, and the best shot with a rifle in that part of the State.

In those early days the mail was carried by men on foot long distances through almost trackless forests, where dangers lurked on every hand; where only the true eye, the steady nerve, and the trusty rifle could

save the frontiersman's life. In the summer time the task was a pleasant one and quickly performed, but when the wintry snows covered the earth to the depth of several feet, and the journey had to be made on snowshoes, it became a matter of far more serious nature. My father was one of those mail carriers for a time, and from the stories he told me in later years of his adventures, he evidently earned all the money he received for his perilous duties.

One cold winter night, when the snow glistened like diamonds in the bright rays of the moon, which was just rising over the forest trees, the sturdy mail carrier, after a hearty meal at a farmhouse in the wilderness, proceeded to strap his knapsack on his back for a night journey toward home, with the next habitation fifteen miles distant. The matronly woman, with all in the house, sought to dissuade him from the rash undertaking, but he only smiled, and opening the door, he passed out into the night. But the woman followed him; the howling of the wolves sounded painfully distinct and close at hand, and she called the young man's attention to the fact that these gaunt forerunners of famine had never been so bold and numerous before. He only fondled his rifle and said he guessed they would keep out of his way. The woman was alarmed and fairly aroused, though outwardly calm. She knew the daring character of the man before her, and she saw that his desire to reach home that night might cost him his life. So, seeming to acquiesce, she induced him to come back, and sit down while she prepared for him a "strong toddy" to enable him to bear the fatigues of the journey, as she expressed it, though secretly she had no faith in strong drink; but the mail-carrier reluctantly yielded, and while the kettle was boiling the old lady commenced a long story of her girlhood in the loved and far-away New England. When the toddy was ready the story was but half told, and when the story was finished our hero was safe from wolves for that night. The old lady had drugged the liquor, for she reasoned that no one man could long face the fierce, gleaming eyes that shone on every side of the house.

Now, it chanced that on the trail which the mail carrier would have taken had the woman permitted him, three men struggled manfully through the deep snow, hoping to reach the farmhouse before dark.

As night came on they were within two miles of their destination, but no farther could they go. The cruel, treacherous wolves, that had long hovered on their path, now gathered in on all sides, and, snapping and snarling, plainly told them they must stop and fight for their lives. This they did, and three well-directed bullets warned the pack to keep a little farther away.

Fortunately, at this juncture, one of the men discovered a fallen tree, the top of which was some ten feet from the ground. If they could walk up this long tree to the branches, they felt they would be comparatively safe, for the time being at least.

By mounting the log, and then giving their foes another volley, they readily accomplished their design, and actually their lives were saved. But who can tell the horrors of that long, cold winter night, with thousands of famishing wolves only barely out of reach, whose ceaseless howlings made all efforts to communicate with each other by word of mouth futile and useless.

Further they speedily found that wolves could walk a log as well as they. Shooting them answered for a time; but on they came faster than the gun could be loaded, and it became necessary to club a rifle and knock the intruder off whenever they came close enough, which was frequently the case, as the long line of wolves in the rear kept crowding those in front on to a fate which in nearly every case was sufficiently tragical for the contemplation of any one—if at a safe distance.

There were numerous branches in this treetop which afforded the three men good opportunity for holding on, and at the same time made it difficult for the enemy to get roused, so that it required but a moderate blow, when a wolf was struggling to get by a large limb, to knock him off into the horrid, distended jaws, which, in nearly every case, would tear him in pieces.

To some it might appear fine sport for these three men to stand up, and by turns knock off wolves for other wolves to kill and eat, but the men could not help thinking, all that wretched night, that if either failed to hit his wolf fairly and the animal once fastened his jaws upon him, the waiting pack below would soon have something beside wolf meat to feast upon.

However, they were saved, and this is how it happened:

The mail carrier awoke from his lethargic slumbers about an hour before day, and, realizing his situation, took his rifle and started at once.

He was just congratulating himself that the wolves had all gone, probably after other game, when suddenly he heard their howling, and almost immediately came on the whole pack that beleaguered the men in the tree-trap.

It was now growing daylight, and the carrier, being an experienced trapper, knew that the wolves at that hour could be easily frightened; he saw the men, and knew they could do nothing for themselves, so, discharging his rifle at the nearest wolf and then firing his brace of double-barreled pistols in quick succession as he ran, the wolves fell back, and as a puff of wind gathers a cloud of snow and scatters it none can tell where, so those wolves disappeared in the forest.

It was none too soon. The poor men in the tree were almost paralyzed with cold, and the horrors of their awful experience, and all acknowledged that they were on the point of yielding to what they had come to think was an inevitable fate, when the welcome report of a rifle was heard.

But what a sight met their gaze as the day fully dawned. Acres of snow were beaten down, while around and under the tree the bones of wolves that had been killed were scattered thickly about.

The mail carrier accompanied the three men to their homes, which he had so recently left, and there over a good breakfast learned how a woman had stolen away his wits, and without doubt saved his life. And she learned, kind soul, that a good deed is often practically its own reward, for in striving to save the life of a neighbor she was really working for the lives of her husband and two grown-up sons, whose danger she knew nothing of. But her action, also, was more far-reaching than she could have ever dreamed, for her two sons and the mail carrier in after years became quite prominent in the affairs of State, and very useful members of society.

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(LARGE SIZE.)

The Best Stories Published of the Famous Western Outlaw.

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- 2—Jesse James' Legacy; or, The Border Cyclone.
- 3—Jesse James' Dare-Devil Dance; or, Betrayed by One of Them.
- 4—Jesse James' Black Agents; or, The Wild Raid on Bullion City.
- 5—Jesse James' Oath; or, Tracked to Death.
- 6—Jesse James in Wyoming; or, The Den in the Black Hills.
- 7—Jesse James, Rube Burrows & Co.
- 8—Jesse James' Daring Deed; or, The Raid on the Pine Ridge Jail.
- 9—Jesse James at the Throttle; or, The Hold-Up at Dead Man's Ditch.
- 10—Jesse James' Double; or, The Man from Missouri.
- 11—Jesse James Among the Moonshiners; or, The Train Robbers' Trail in Kentucky.
- 12—Jesse James' Close Call; or, The Outlaw's Last Rally in Southern Wyoming.
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- 17—Jesse James' Cave; or, The Secret of the Dead.
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- 19—Jesse James at Bay; or, The Train Robbers' Trail.
- 20—Jesse James in Disguise; or, The Missouri Outlaw as a Showman.
- 21—Jesse James' Feud with the Elkins Gang; or, The Bandit's Revenge.
- 22—Jesse James' Chase Through Tennessee; or, Tracked by Bloodhounds.
- 23—Jesse James In Deadwood; or, The Ghost of Shadow Gulch.
- 24—Jesse James' Deal in Dead Valley; or, At Odds of Fifty to One.
- 25—Jesse James on the Trail for Revenge; or, The Outlaw's Oath.
- 26—Jesse James' Kidnaping Plot; or, The Massacre at Weldon's.
- 27—Jesse James Among the Mormons; or, Condemned to Death by the Saints.
- 28—Jesse James' Capture and Escape; or, Outwitting the Pancake Diggings Posse.
- 29—Jesse James' Hunt to Death; or, The Fate of the Outlaw Vasquez.
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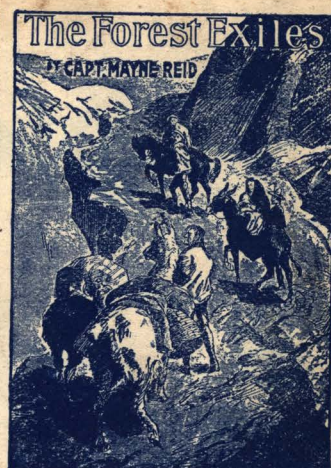
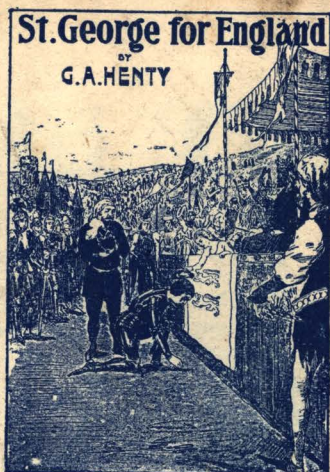
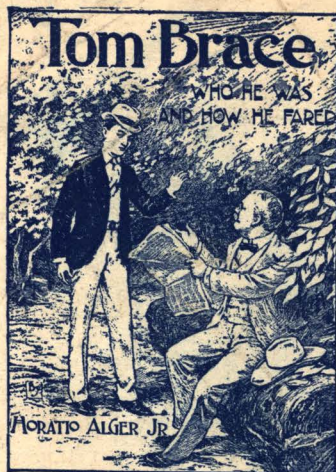
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